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Artistic consciousness as spiritual survival: a reading of Tiepolo's hound

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Artistic Consciousness as Spiritual Survival: A Reading of *Tiepolo's Hound*

by

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Signatures have been redacted for privacy

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ABBREVIATIONS:

AL = *Another Life*

CP = *Collected Poems*

TH = *Tiepolo's Hound*

WT = *What the Twilight Says*

Artistic Consciousness as Spiritual Survival: A Reading of *Tiepolo's Hound*

Derek Walcott's writing presents issues of complexity and of accessibility. How do we understand the message, however, unless we have the background? The density of his language is not un-Shakespearian in its extended rhythmic quality, its reflection of simultaneous and complex social models, its psychological precision, and its layered meanings as revealing commentary on the possibilities of syntax in English. But the force of his work derives less from the kind of social awareness felt in Dickens or Miller or Chekhov than the individual psychological revelation of Defoe or Dickinson or Proust. Part of the difficulty in naming his affiliation derives from a privileged removal in time and space, in terms of culture. Perhaps there is some of this in all artists' lives.

Critical confusion generated by Vladimir Nabokov's work, which still continues, is probably equaled in the case of Walcott, only for Walcott it appears to be less a case of confusion than neglect. Part of the problem, as Paul Breslin has pointed out, is his distance from either a quick identification as either "post" colonial or "post" modern. The historic commentary under the umbrella "postcolonial" reviews a politics qualified by dominance or assimilation. Walcott sees that the role of victim as a capitulation, however, even in cultural terms; his work attempts to express a reality which is compassionate, inclusive, and accepting of a religious belief which is often surprised by its own intuitions. The social commentary under the umbrella "postmodern" reviews an aesthetics of artificial construct. Typography, technology, urbanity, move us toward a world removed from nature. Walcott's aesthetics are closely linked to natural phenomena, the effects of light and color in terms of

direct observation, and the capture of human expression.

This essay reflects on the interlocking devices used by Derek Walcott in *Tiepolo's Hound*: the biography of Camille Pissarro, the history of the painting *The Feast at the House of Levi*, Caribbean history and art history. Walcott has constructed allegories and metaphors within these frameworks that reinforce his comparison of process with prayer. Prayer, in this sense, brings persistence, integrity, and friendship to the level of allegory. These are the keys to survival. Artistic perception and process is antidote to the psychological, ultimately spiritual, threat of "erasure."

Original gifts: The expressive experience of Derek Walcott's life and work

Derek Walcott gained world attention by becoming the first writer from the Caribbean to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. He was born in 1930 in Castries, St. Lucia, in the British West Indies. His father, who died when Derek and his twin brother Roderick were one year old, was an amateur painter and poet, and Walcott felt his own gifts to be an extension of his father's. Both grandfathers were European (one primarily Dutch, the other English) and both grandmothers primarily African. Complex genealogy is not unusual in the Caribbean, and is a source of some of Walcott's precise perceptions about history's convergence in individual identity. His mother Alix was head teacher at a Methodist school that provided English instruction on the island for children not being raised with a tutor, including a good portion of the island's French Catholic majority. Walcott began writing in notebooks at a young age, practicing the meters and methods of classic canonists, while hearing an everyday speech sprung out of multiple cultures, in a place where

nature is an immediate experience. He has expressed his belief in “the element of surprise” while exemplifying the mastery of tradition.¹ His power of visual observation was also informed by traditional training in painting by a friend of his father’s who became a mentor in his teen years.

Walcott studied at St. Mary’s College in St. Lucia from 1941 until 1950. He began writing his first serious play at the age of seventeen. His first collection of *Twenty-five Poems*, privately published when Walcott was eighteen, received critical notice in London as well as four Caribbean cities. He founded the St. Lucia Arts Guild where *Henri Christophe*, his first dramatic production, was performed, and graduated from the University College of the West Indies. He then taught at Jamaica College in Kingston. In 1958 he received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to study theater in the United States, and the next year founded the Theater Workshop in Trinidad, where he subsequently invested nearly twenty years of effort. He continued to write both for the theater and in verse, receiving an Obie award for the play *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a MacArthur fellowship, the Queen’s Gold Medal for Poetry, and the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature. He has written eighteen collections of poetry including *In a Green Night* (1962), *The Castaway and Other Poems* (1965), *Sea Grapes* (1976), *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979) and *The Fortunate Traveller* (1982). *Collected Poems* was published in 1986. He has also written three book-length poems, the autobiographical *Another Life* (1973), *Omeros* (1989) an epic of the Caribbean, and *Tiepolo’s Hound* (2000) a poetic quest linked with art history. Twenty of his plays have been published, including *Henri Christophe*, *The Sea At Dauphin*, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (based on a fable about outwitting the devil), *Drums and Colors*, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *Remembrance*, *Pantomime* (based on the Crusoe story), *Malcauchon*, or

Six in the Rain, and *The Joker of Seville* (a commissioned adaptation from Tirso de Molina's 1630 original of don Juan).² Walcott's interviews have also been published in Robert Hamner's *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott* (1993), and *Conversations with Derek Walcott* (ed. William Baer, 1996). A collection of Walcott essays, *What the Twilight Says*, appeared in 1998. His work covers a wide range of artistic endeavor— set design and theory, songwriting, journalism, art criticism, painting, essays, writing and producing plays, and most significantly, his poetry. At mid-2003 Walcott has thirteen titles in print, and another fifteen monographs are available about his work.

The vocal representations and cadences that exemplify Walcott's poetry were developed in his writing for theater, and his sense of history has helped steer the course of Caribbean theater. Yet, even as his recognition broadens with the further publication of the plays, critical opinion subordinates his dramatic output to his achievements in verse. He is known for revision in both endeavors. Goldstraw's 1984 annotated bibliography tracks numerous variants, opening with the example of four full text versions of "Sea Grapes" from January through July of 1976 (1). But John Thieme notes, "To a far greater degree than is the case with the poetry, Walcott seems to see his plays as 'works in progress'... reflect[ing] the extent to which he regards his dramatic utterances as provisional" (204). Walcott uses both as vehicles for viewing history, from which viewers will "remember" their own revisions (in the sense that all history is simply a way of telling "the story.")

Walcott also wrote songs for some plays. His use of Bob Marley lyrics as the epigram to the poem "Light of the World," reveals his affinity with popular culture as well as his musical interest. Walcott's paintings, which provided playbills for early productions and book covers for his poetry, also were reproduced as a collection of selected work in

Tiepolo's Hound.

The cliché of a writer slipping into indefinite lull following reception of the Nobel Prize appears to have been avoided in Walcott's post-Nobel experience, although there was a seven-year break between *Omeros* and Walcott's next major poem, *The Bounty*, which came after his mother's death. Although the Nobel generated attention for Walcott, publishing data reflects more widespread critical attention since the turn of the millennium. *Tiepolo's Hound* was published early in 2000. It was originally planned as a printed collection of Walcott artwork, but the selected paintings became interludes within a major poem linking Caribbean history with the history of art.

Other Caribbean nationals who have achieved world prominence reveal interesting contrasts that yield some insight into Walcott as well as the important similarity of a rigorous English education. Sir Arthur Lewis, who received the Nobel Prize for economics in 1979, grew up fifteen years earlier in the same neighborhood in St. Lucia as Walcott; his father died when he was still young. Lewis studied at the London School of Economics where he became a lecturer. Much of his intellectual work is based on interpreting history, and he was forced to invent a professional context for himself outside the culture in which he grew up. He served as UN advisor to governments in Ghana, Nigeria, Trinidad, and Barbados, and in the early 1970's set up the Caribbean Development Bank. V. S. Naipaul, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001 and was cited for works of "perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny," was born in Trinidad of Indian parents, the same year as Walcott. Naipaul's father wrote journalism as well as creatively³ but experienced an onset of madness in which he looked into a mirror and could not see himself; his death from a heart attack came before the younger Naipaul's publishing success, although he had imagined his son as a

writer. Dislocation is a central preoccupation of Naipaul's fiction, which focuses on characters that are essentially contemporary and cosmopolitan. Kamau Brathwaite, who received the 1994 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, is a poet from Barbados who was also born in 1930. He graduated with honors from Pembroke College in Cambridge at the age of 23, and has lived in Ghana, the West Indies, and England.

Distinctions among the three Caribbean writers appear in their individual responses to an infamous expression of intolerance. In 1888 a historian named Froude, who had authored a twelve-volume history of England, published opinions about the West Indies in *The English in the West Indies or The Bow of Ulysses* (the *Bow* was a reference to a task presented to Ulysses that was considered impossible) that included prophecies such as: "Give them independence, and in a few generations they will peel off such civilisation as they have learnt as easily and as willingly as their coats and trousers".⁴ One of the most damning phrases in Froude's work was one that Walcott chose to mock by attaching it as epigram to his poem, "Air" (1969): "There has been romance, but it has been the romance of pirates and outlaws. The natural graces of life do not show themselves under such conditions. There are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own" (CP 113). This statement, Froude's definitive expression of half a millennium of oppression, was answered differently by Walcott, Naipaul, and Brathwaite according to their individual artistic approaches. Naipaul had published four novels including *A House for Mr. Biswas* when he decided to write a "travelogue" of impressions entitled *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies* (1962). He parroted Froude with a flash of declarative cynicism: "History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies" (29).

Brathwaite, like Walcott, has elected to write poetry rather than prose. His meter is closer to the quick syntax of e e cummings than to Walcott's rhythmic formality—he uses hyphenation as a breaking device. Lines from *The Arrivants* (1973) echo Froude's nihilistic judgment with typical Brathwaite brevity:

For we
who have cre-
ated nothing,
must exist
on nothing. (Chamberlin 30)

Such an expression, without irony, could be interpreted as fatalistic, but the satire indicates its own kind of rejection of the formula of negation. Walcott similarly uses humor for offense-as-defense. But Walcott's style reflects a wide traditional repertoire, linking details in semantic ways that transcend history and point beyond culture's subversion of its own ideals of nobility, justice, and truthfulness.

Walcott has confronted Froude directly and turned his devastating evaluation into ornament. The threat is integrated using a consistent poetic attitude that subsumes history, presenting an artistic portrayal of human psychology's struggle within its natural and social contexts—observed from a viewpoint with positive omniscience, looking toward a conclusion more magnanimous than tragic. But Walcott's "divinity" is greater than "religion" and asks a certain imaginative breadth.⁵

The aforementioned poem "Air" (1969), following the Froude epigram, begins at the level of natural science and then moves to elegy:

The unheard, omnivorous

jaws of this rain forest
 not merely devour all
 but allow nothing vain;
 they never rest,
 grinding their disavowal
 of human pain.

Long, long before us,
 those hot jaws, like an oven
 steaming, were open
 to genocide
 they devoured two yellow races, and
 half of a black ⁶

The problem of genocide and its precursor, power expressed as crushing intolerance, appears in different forms in *Another Life*, *The Fortunate Traveller*, and *Tiepolo's Hound*. To some extent, criticisms that Walcott is stylistically “not Caribbean enough” (i.e. too traditionally “English”) make the same point in different ways, the point being that he “sounds too good” to be authentic. The reasons for this criticism in each case appear to have more to do with the critics than with Walcott. They stop short of noticing Walcott’s achievement in making Caribbean life intelligible through contemporary perceptions of human experiences and their psychological and historical coordinates (once one moves beyond the music of his expression).

The following lines of “Air” illustrate nature in terms of liturgy (“ocean’s surplined choirs”) and even Christology (“the Word made flesh of God”), but the poem shifts on the

word “faith” to a view which indicts proselytizing that functions as a mask for genocide, subverting not only Froude but other “false prophets” on grounds of religious irony: “a faith, infested, cannibal / which eats gods...” The difference between a gospel message and the carriers of that message was a source of struggle from the beginning of European exploration in the Caribbean. For example, one Dominican is documented as preaching to the landowners that their treatment of the natives would result in damnation. The confusion of Christianity with dominance dates further back, to Constantine’s adoption of an official state religion in the fourth century, but it is still being sorted out. As William Cavanaugh points out, “the failure of human rights language to stop acts of torture is a *misunderstanding* of the nature of torture *as primarily an attack on individual bodies*. While certainly individual bodies suffer grievously, *the state’s primary targets in using torture are social bodies*. . .” (emphasis mine). Cavanaugh then turns from sins of omission to sins of commission: “A true social order is based not on defeat of enemies but on identification with victims through participation in Christ’s reconciling sacrifice” (Cavanaugh 3, 11). Simone Weil expresses the problem another way, with disturbing clarity:

Today one might think that the white races had almost lost all feeling for the beauty of the world, and that they had taken upon them the task of making it disappear from all the continents where they have penetrated with their armies, their trade and their religion. As Christ said to the Pharisees: “Woe to you, for ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves and them that were entering in ye hindered.” (472)

Historic religious distortion as a source of irony appears throughout Walcott’s poetry, but is especially evident in *Tiepolo’s Hound*.

Walcott's background exposed him to strong doses of creed, hypocrisy, power, and prayer. His best friend in the years between childhood and adulthood was Catholic. His mother, a popular and respected head teacher of English at the Methodist Infant School in St. Lucia, nurtured a gift perceived as a potential threat by a French Catholic establishment that needed pedagogy in the language of dominance, but wished to maintain the last word in intellectual salvation. When Walcott, at age fourteen, submitted a 44-line poem entitled "1944" relating an interior experience of God through nature which was printed in the local paper, an older priest who had converted to Catholicism responded in the same paper with unexpected force. As Walcott set it down in his own notebook later,

The priest wrote a mechanically witty reply...accusing me of pantheism, of animism, in short of heresy. It was a painful shock to a fourteen-year-old boy to be told that he loved what he thought were the natural manifestations of God in a wrong way; and an equal horror to find that the metre at which he had labored could be so facile a form of argument. (Breslin, *Nation* 15)

In his essay "Leaving School" (1965), Walcott notes the implication that "Methodists went to purgatory or hell, a Catholic hell, only after some strenuous dispensation" (Hamner 27) and a pattern in critical response to his first poetry book "savaged in a review in the *Port-of-Spain Gazette* by the Catholic archbishop" (31-32). When a fire destroyed two-thirds of Castries the same year, sparing the home of his family, the young writer about to seek his fortune elsewhere could not help seeing the fire artistically as *deus-ex-machina*.

Besides his stylistic links with tradition, and his occupation with religion, faith, and their intertextuality with history in his writings, Walcott is exceptional among his peers as someone who has chosen to build and maintain a home in the Caribbean. A low score in

mathematics prevented him from realizing an education in England, and he set his sights on what he could achieve in the Caribbean. Although he left his native island as a young adult, residence in New England and international travel evolved through attempts to found a theatrical community developing Caribbean vision and local talent. As his vocational circuit expanded, he carved out a widening context for his life, which in some ways models the creative possibilities projected in his poetry, its imaginative connections. His broadening personal experience is then reinvested through his art.

Walcott presents creative options not only as expressions of the human condition but as of states of mind, degrees of perception and truthfulness. Religious, artistic and literary traditions are written largely into his references. One example of his outlook concludes “As John to Patmos,” the third of the initial *25 Poems* which moved to second place in Walcott’s *Collected Poems 1948-1984*:

O slave, soldier, worker under red trees sleeping, hear

What I swear now, as John did:

To praise lovelong, the living and the brown dead.

Praise is defined as a form of prayer: “to glorify (a god or saint) *especially* worship by song.” Here the “lovelong” metonymy of “life” and “love” recalls John’s own metonymy of “God” and “love,” energizing a vow that Walcott has kept in his paintings and verse.

The same year as this defining step in his published verse, Walcott was also writing history onto the stage. With *Henri Christophe*, Walcott dramatized a story picked up a dozen years later by Aime Cesaire. The action shows black courage and cruelty, nationalism and the multiple dimensions of pride. The successful Haitian revolution made slavery unsupportable from the standpoint of reason and even, conceivably, economics. Successful

slave revolts had become streetwise reality. Yet, this history had awaited a narrator, a voice.

Walcott's work with drama also heightened his already keen awareness of the sense of dialogue in written forms. Poetically, he eventually extended dialogue figuratively into metaphor that approaches anthropomorphism, voices that are perceptions, as in "The Sea is History" from *The Star Apple Kingdom*:

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?

Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,

in that grey vault. The sea. The sea

has locked them up. The sea is History. (CP 364)

On the first page of *Tiepolo's Hound* the Middle Passage of Atlantic slave traffic is brought forward with a line that evokes the singing of slaves: "the salt breeze brings the sound of Mission slaves / chanting." The syntax could also refer to the sound of the sea echoing and memorializing their song, as if nature provides a missing elegy. Such claim to recognition is empowered by Walcott's compression of history and biography into a few words, a technique not reserved for the slave diaspora. Diverse other nationalities were brought in to fill the need for labor in the Caribbean as African slaves gained autonomy, among them Irish, Chinese, and East Indian. The Scarecrow Press "Area Bibliographies" series for the Caribbean (London, 1998) identifies authors and editors from 29 islands or island groups according to languages Spanish, English, French, and Dutch. Walcott lined them up together in another poem from *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, "The Schooner *Flight*" which also includes a celebrated four-line autobiography:

The driver size up my bags with a grin:

"This time, Shabine, like you really gone!"

I ain't answer the ass, I simply pile in
 the back seat and watch the sky burn
 [.....]
 But they had started to poison my soul
 with their big house, big car, big-time bohbohl,
 coolie, nigger, Syrian, and French Creole,
 so I leave it for them and their carnival—
 I taking a sea-bath, I gone down the road.
 I know these islands from Monos to Nassau,
 a rusty head sailor with sea-green eyes,
 that they nickname Shabine, the patois for
 any red nigger, and I, Shabine, saw
 when these slums of empire was paradise.
 I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
 I had a sound colonial education,
 I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
 and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation. (CP 345)

Stark syntax here fits seamlessly into a classic cadence that makes language the servant of inclusion. "I'm nobody" transforms the pejoration of Froude with the cleverness of Odysseus into a poetic "nation" which recognizes a common, flawed, and beautiful humanity and its pervasive yearning for a lost "paradise," a yearning which may be naively implicit ("you really gone") or as conscious as the poet ("they had started to poison my soul"), extending to anywhere the soul is still alive. The question is implied, where is a good place

to *keep* the soul alive. The “like” of the cab driver is obviously an import from sixties California, simile without a subject, an idiomatic stateside note. A “coolie” calls up descendants of Asian labor brought to the Caribbean to augment the labor force after slave emancipation. The Pan American Health Organization discusses perceptions about ethnicity and its complexity in the area by using successive census category listings; the Jamaican census for 1943 employs eighteen categories—among them seven European nationalities, with Chinese, East Indian, and “Syrian” and “Syrian/colored” as two separate categories. “French creole” is the most common language of Walcott’s St. Lucia. Walcott has brought them all together in conciliatory iambs, a common denominational trip on the tongue. This is the lingo of Walcott posing as the lingo of “Shabine,” and Bruce King relates that after the publication of the poem, “Shabine” came into educated usage for a “red” male (375). The lines are another Walcottian act of faith in the power of language as, potentially, an act of praise which also provides a group portrait.

Preparing the text: allegory, biography, craft

it was a separate city, with its own legislature
of perfection, its braided ruler hidden.

Tiepolo's Hound, Book One III. iv

The first impression of *Tiepolo's Hound*, Derek Walcott's millennial book-length poem-with-paintings, prompts a brace of finely excessive responses. There is a "hook" in the title, but the eye is first drawn to a painting of a fisherman rendered with flat bright geometries, gathering up his net by a stretch of sand in the tropics. Tiepolo was a Venetian painter known for pastel colors in the eighteenth century High Baroque. Pronunciation provides a musical pun at casual speed, but "Tiepolo Sound" returns as an interpretive suggestion: "*Was the name Tiepolo there for euphony?*" (TH 123) This question begs another: was it *where*? In the author's memory, surely. But where do we begin to look at the poem as a whole, and in what century?⁷

Tiepolo's Hound, like a number of Walcott's other poems, uses the "reading" of history as a "ground," similar to the backing selected and prepared by a painter. This poem refers to the Inquisition, slavery, Impressionism, the Renaissance, geography, and various religious traditions. Two of the first three reproductions in the book picture artist Paul Gauguin, the Frenchman who lived in Paris, Lima, and Copenhagen, as well as Martinique, Tahiti, and the Marquesas, where he died. Four years before his death Gauguin completed a mural sized painting entitled with a series of questions: *D'où venons nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?* (*Where Do We come from? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*).⁸

Walcott's veritable tapestry of couplets could be read as answers.

Where Do We Come From?

the horizon underlines their origins—

Pissarros from the ghetto of Braganza (TH 3)

The window onto history through which each spectator considers particular revisions is a common starting point in Walcott's written world. Our station on the planet is a coordinate of belief, incident, and conquest; until we acknowledge this, we do not truly understand our relation with others. The question "Where Do We Come From?" informs "how" we "are," as it explains our previous fate, our collective background, our cultural inheritance. In Walcott's writing, a wide-angle view of history is one important source of the self-knowledge that helps determine whether we will truly "be."

The question is also a cue for biography. *Tiepolo's Hound* is Walcott's second book-length verse to integrate major sections of autobiography into the music, pattern and stagecraft of his poetry, the first being *Another Life* (1973), a poetic chambered nautilus viewing life, love, and loss from an authorial distance of two decades.⁹ *Another Life* opens with images that create an ever-expanding artistic perception of a view on a veranda that is ultimately perceived as a "cinquecento fragment in gilt frame" (4). *Tiepolo's Hound*, as biography, extends ("comes from") *Another Life*, and Walcott creatively picks up the "cinquecento fragment" of two decades (or five centuries) earlier and expands it into a specific "remembered painting" by Veronese (in 1573) with personal and historic significance. Likewise, "hills stippled with violet / as if they had seen Pissarro" (74) in *Another Life* are expanded to consider much more about Pissarro in *Tiepolo's Hound*, where Walcott's life is counterpoint with the Impressionist painter who also lived in the Caribbean

and then moved to Europe. Walcott's focus on art stakes its claims in both of these long poetic narratives alongside the confusion and evanescence of life. The works present the artist's "willfulness" in choosing between countries, in determining where they are "from," as a part of vocation. Artistic decisions become aesthetic and political as well as personal, and partially define, for their audience, the imaginative bounds of human freedom.

The question "Where Do We Come From?" also leads in spiritual terms toward the metaphysical. In a book on American intellectual "pilgrims" Paul Elie provides an explanation referring to "the Scholastic idea of the 'analogy of being'—the idea that the natural world is the image of the supernatural one,"¹⁰ and this model seems apt for Walcott, certainly in *Tiepolo's Hound*, who wrote in an early poem "this island is heaven" ("As John To Patmos," CP 5) where life began in a natural "paradise" representing the true and the beautiful in its own way, deserving of artistic preservation. Pissarro, as we see or are reminded in the poem, becomes a Promethean bearer of this fire of nature to the Impressionists.

To return to the "analogy of being": artistic survival, in historic terms, also becomes the "type" of spiritual survival in the world of the poet. What is remembered is "saved." Walcott is deeply aware of his position as a voice of remembrance, and uses images of diving as a way to consider Caribbean history in a 1997 essay in *Architectural Digest*: "the maps of coral under the skin of the light on the water, conceal a past that is ridden with inhuman misery and superhuman forbearance, beaches and forts whose flags changed while its slave population did not" (30). The slave trade and its complicity in attempting to deny humanity to those involved as a means of rationalization, has been portrayed since Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe as equally debasing on both sides of the power equation, but more

debasing to the perpetrators. Walcott has pointed out by way of emphasis that Africans selling other Africans was a prerequisite part of the formula.

In 1952, Frantz Fanon, speaking of race and cultural perceptions and expectations in terms of language and psychology from the Caribbean, wrote “There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region...where an authentic upheaval can be born” (8). Fanon iterates that “These things I am going to say, not shout” (7). Walcott’s vision and voice take the same approach. A number of tribes of Indians already inhabited the Caribbean when Europeans appeared, but slavery, disease and violent conflict decimated and ultimately destroyed them. In *Another Life*, Walcott contrasts European legends of valor with an event from the island of Granada in 1651. The Carib Indians, realizing their betrayal by the French, began a revolt that resulted in the burning of their huts and a massacre of women and children. They were pursued to a northern cliff where the forty or so not killed by French weapons threw themselves onto the rocks below. Walcott makes a powerful stylistic distinction between

history through the sea-washed eye
of our choleric, ginger-haired headmaster,
...a lonely Englishman who loved parades,
sailing and Conrad’s prose” (70)

and the “leaping Caribs” who evoke a sudden shift in expression:

I am pounding the faces of gods back into the red clay they
leapt from the mattock of heel after heel as if heel
after heel were my thumbs that once gouged out as sacred
vessels for women the sockets of eyes, the deaf howl (71)

until the rhythm rises into an exclamation using the local French referent “Le Morne de Sauteurs,” (“mournful jump”, commonly referred to in English as “Leaper’s Hill”) which recalls the Spartan soldiers who made a final brave stand against Xerxes:

Sauteurs!... I am no more
than that lithe dreaming runner beside me... //
 ... I am one
with the thousand runners who will break on loud sand
at Thermopylae... (72)

In a more local context, this compression reads as wit, as in Walcott’s early verses on Castries’ devastating 1948 fire and reconstruction: “Slowly she rose, the New Jerusalem / created in the image of *The Commonwealth Today*” (“A City’s Death by Fire,” *CP* 6). Walcott sees a similar imperative of invention in the annual Caribbean cycle of Carnival, a common engagement with art renewed by “planned obsolescence” (Hamner 55). This cycle has a positive side, a fresh start in a world aware of nature, the strength of a world “prestructuralist and preindustrial” which “hardly brushes against modernity” as Paul Breslin employs Antonio Benitez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island* to map Walcott’s world (*Nation* 292-3). In *Tiepolo’s Hound* this perception is expressed in the closing pages as a diurnal dusk that becomes a metaphor for forgiveness, “passing thorns of forgiving bougainvillea” as “all the sorrows that lay heavily on us, / the repeated failures, the botched trepidations / will pass like the lights on bridges...” (*TH* 163).

Walcott also had a chance to reflect on these processes of historical consciousness in a review for an anthology of English West Indian literature written during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, pieces which he finds to be “historical, archival but . . . also redemptions from illegitimacy. Their discovery confirms the claim of the enslaved to a

certain right, the continuity of History, the privilege of a record of illumination instead of the black hole of ignorance, of an enforced amnesia” (*New York Review of Books* June 15, 2000, p. 60) The clinical term recurs from Walcott’s Nobel speech of December 1992 which presents the complexity of issues in constructing Caribbean history but which serves for other histories as well:

All of the Antilles, every island, is an effort of memory; every mind, every racial biography culminating in amnesia and fog. Pieces of sunlight through the fog and sudden rainbows, *arcs-en-ciel*. That is the effort, the labour of the Antillean imagination, rebuilding its gods from bamboo frames, phrase by phrase. (*WT* 82)

The question of recall is a major theme in *Tiepolo’s Hound*, albeit anecdotal. The detail from a painting named in the title, “Tiepolo’s Hound,” is a mnemonic error. Tiepolo’s Hound does not, in fact, exist *except* in the narrator’s memory. Where did it come from? Something in the psyche invented it. This experience of misattribution is not uncommon. Recognizing it at face value is as important as any other matter of historical accuracy. In historic terms, this fault line of perhaps totalitarian “inaccuracy” raises deep questions. In poetic terms, the mistake becomes a way of illustrating the author’s valuation of process over object, a means toward the end of artistic redemption. Artistic “process” will transform the misattribution into acceptance, compassion, and a search for something “greater.”

We may also relate this inquiry back again to Gauguin’s first question and ask whether any of us truly understand where we are “from”? At the beginning of the poem, Walcott links the two great “diasporas” of Jews and African slaves. A major difference between the Jewish experience and that of the deported Africans was that the Jews retained

their collective history, their source narratives. The African slaves were more violently detached as psychological and sociological scapegoats, so they assimilated other narratives, identifying especially with the account of the Exodus.¹¹

Christians, too, supposedly trace their origins to the Exodus, and, ultimately, to Adam. If Walcott's position in geography and history makes him "defiantly pre- rather than post-modern," as Breslin suggests in reviewing Burnett's work (*Modernism* 4), it also grants playful artistic freedom in terms of cosmology. Intellectually, Walcott can confront the conflicted views of Columbus and his intellectual legacy, concerning the Caribbean origins of the Americas—views summarized by Hector Avalos: "On the one hand, it is a sinful land in need of redemption by Christians. On the other, it is the land that contains the sinless paradise which is unapproachable by Christians, except with special permission" (72).

This "blank slate" of hope suffuses Walcott's artistic metaphors. "I settle before an easel to redeem the fault / that multiplies itself in desperate survival" (*TH* 98) reflects a Caribbean history quite distinct from much of the mythology in the United States. In a 1974 essay, Walcott made some sharply drawn observations about "origin": "[W]e know that America is black, that so much of its labor, its speech, its music, its very style of living is generated by what is now cunningly and carefully isolated as 'black' culture, that what is most original in it has come out of its ghettos, its river-cultures, its plantations" (Hamner 51).

When Denmark decreed "gradual" emancipation for the Caribbean in 1847 the slaves threatened to burn a town if it did not take place sooner, and the governor of St. Croix did all in his power to side with them. Five years later 40,000 slaves found themselves lacking political rights, but technically, "free." This happened before Pissarro's final departure from the area, and appears in Walcott's chronology. "Stunned, perhaps, by their sudden manumission,

/ they drifted like zombies from their sugar estate" (*TH* 28). These lines encapsulate issues of a struggle for identity that is an overwhelming social, and not simply individual, question.

What are we? The second question from Gauguin also informs each artist's quest: "until I doubt the very beast's existence, / as much as mine sometimes..." (*TH* 121). The development of answers is multi-narrative, allusive, and protean. *Tiepolo's Hound* uses art as portrait and art history as landscape but it also goes beyond these.

Pissarro, especially, functions allegorically as a figure of persistence and artistic integrity.¹² Biographically, Pissarro is a young Sephardic Jew who grows up in St. Thomas, is educated in Paris, returns to the Caribbean and goes to Venezuela with Fritz Melbye to paint, then settles in Europe for good, becoming a prime mover of "Impressionism." Allegorically, Pissarro's strengths are contrasted with the threat of failure, erasure from history, and the elusive hound. Walcott also uses our historical knowledge of Pissarro's pursuit of artistic triumph, placing it within his own poetic world of intense Caribbean light.

This Pissarro / Walcott parallel is the most extensively developed structure in the poem, and the inclusion of paintings provides the expectation of a concurrent "reading" of compositions. There are also interesting thematic contrasts. Pissarro's paintings often show figures involved in the daily routine of work. Although his cover painting portrays a fisherman, several of Walcott's paintings depict recreation or leisure, and he opens the poem on Sunday, a day of prayer and quiet, although the Pissarro family walks to the warehouse where Camille's uncle "jerks the locks / rattling their chains" (*TH* 3). These poetic and painterly partial answers to "What Are We?" are situated, moreover, in a poetic universe deeply concerned with metaphors of faith, a hagiography of artists, spiritual co-ordinates such as the important balance between work and rest, spontaneous yet willed aesthetic responses, and prayer.

Veronese is presented to us in the poem as a historical painter of the late Renaissance through one of his best-known works, which has an anecdotal history linked to the Inquisition. The genius of Veronese also provided artistic possibilities developed further by Tiepolo one hundred years later. Symbolically, he is used as a figure of courage, in refusing to buckle to pressure to substantively change a painting. Tiepolo's paintings are a source for both praise and irony on the part of Walcott. The later paintings were designed for architectural settings presenting "heavenly" views. It is this artistry that Walcott "remembers" as both a character and author—Tiepolo's divine gift of consummate skill.

Walcott has divided the poem into four parts, 3,400 lines arranged in couplets of shifting pentameter rhymed abab cdcd. These four "books" are subdivided with Roman numerals into twenty-six chapters, each having four Arabic numbered subsections containing between a dozen and 84 lines. In order to appreciate the several levels of invention sustained in the poem, a concise overview of historic and anecdotal material is useful. Some of this detail will be subsequently linked to thematic development.

Book One begins with Pissarro family background, set in motion with a walk not unlike a Caribbean variant of *La Grande Jatte*.¹³ The physical survival of the Pissarros in escaping the Inquisition presages the artistic survival of Pissarro in the vocation of artist. This book introduces Walcott in the present, examines the visual and everyday life of the Caribbean, and initiates a "search" theme that continues into Book Four through the device of the "remembered" painting in a museum with multiple associations.

Book Two opens with Pissarro's permanent move to France, beginning in Paris. This section delineates the struggle to establish his own style of painting with the other "Impressionists," through repeated rejection by the Academy and the public, his friendships

and the pressures of family life, juxtaposed with memories of St. Thomas. Walcott interjects as narrator briefly in the middle of this book and again in its close, although it is evident we retrace Pissarro's life with his perceptions. The setting provides material for expanding the theme of "process" while defining Pissarro's ideals in Walcott's terms: "Adam unlatching the gate of Paradise" (*TH* 52). Memory is also presented as artistic metaphor, *memento mori* contrasted with cupidon's arrows through an invented encounter between painter and waitress: "for every artisan / a skull and a pierced heart" (*TH* 50).

Book Three is laden with war, death, failure, as they weigh on Pissarro's life. Walcott includes his own travels incorporating the hindsight of history, an image in Germany, a trip to Spain. An apostrophe is inserted in italics, an aside that functions as a self-conscious island of contemplation. The fragility of art is placed in historic context. Most of Pissarro's early paintings were destroyed during the Franco-Prussian war by soldiers who used the canvases as boot mats: "There were cartloads of dung in the house... She would keep / whichever of a thousand canvases had survived" (*TH* 77).

Book Four opens in Venice and its "scumbled . . . reflections of her palaces" (*TH* 115), where the poet confronts an imaginative world of reflected, altered realities. Although the "mystery" painting has survived the Inquisition, the narrator does not locate the elusive hound of the painting, and makes a conscious decision to dismiss further search as irrelevant. Coincidentally, our attention is directed to a commonplace dog, a "starving pup" needing care. Distortions of memory must become an accepted part of life. One must make peace with history and ask forgiveness. This book closes with a look up into the stars.

As is evident from the first few pages, Walcott appears in the poem as an actor and observer throughout, Walcott who visits Spain and lives in Boston and sometimes in

St. Lucia, where he paints the kinds of landscapes Pissarro grew up with. At the allegorical level, Walcott is also a seeker of what is most “true” in life, of the “divine,” through both poetry and painting. To linger a moment on the book’s conclusion concurs with the last question of the Gauguin title: *Where are we going?* and as we near the final page, there is a preliminary hint in “the coming night, and the first star” (TH 163). The idea of destination seems to lead, my reading suggests, toward a route indicated by Dante.

The first of the *Collected Poems* was given a new title, “Prelude”, but was otherwise the same as in Walcott’s original self-published book. The last lines recall some of Dante’s opening visionary expositions: “Until from all I turn to think how, / in the middle of the journey through my life, / O how I came upon you, my / Reluctant leopard of the slow eyes” (CP 4). Reference to the beginning of the *The Divine Comedy* re-appears in the third section of *Tiepolo’s Hound*, where Pissarro’s life sounds a note of farcical contrast and desperation: “He saw a rabbit wandering a dark wood” (TH 83). With the many dogs roaming through the text, the rabbit appears like a lost quarry, or some creature magically reduced. In the last book as the narrator questions his narration the Hound turns into “a chained Cerberus,” as “demonic” as Dante’s rendition of the mythical three-headed monster (TH 134).

And then, in the closing couplets, the dog becomes a constellation of stars. The conclusion of the poem in this way imitates Dante’s closure of all three sections of *The Divine Comedy*, each of which ends with a rhyme on “stars.” It contrasts with the book’s opening images and the cover, with their bright sunlight, although these join in Dante’s last line.¹⁴ We are left looking up, with the poet, into the heavens.

Walcott’s writing, with a verbal texture as rich as any of Monet’s surfaces, could be considered somewhat impressionistic; his social and cultural perceptions are as revolutionary

in their own way as impressionism was. A part of this palimpsest includes what Breslin refers to as Walcott's "religiosity and Platonism." Breslin's appraisal of cultural "movements" in terms of Walcott suggests that "for Walcott, postmodern skepticism itself becomes absorbed in a larger dialectic of faith and doubt" (*Nation* 292-3). At the end of Chapter XXI, as Walcott confronts a labyrinth of doubt, comparing both history and poet to the Minotaur, he refers to "prayer" twice in six lines, a "grace I needed" to obtain "by prayer, by poetry" as the "pendulum's axe" of "Time" swings¹⁵, until the clock dials of noon and midnight are lifted "in a steeped prayer" (*TH* 128). Despite his skill at presenting destructive or superstitious aspects of religion alongside its comforts, I read his overall stance as one of receptive discernment and hopeful belief. His faith shines through the text in a way that is not an apology for a personal denomination, but presents mystery in the manner of Vladimir Nabokov's "The Mother" or Delmore Schwartz's "Starlight like Intuition Pierced the Twelve."

I have chosen to refer to this as an inquiry into "artistic consciousness as spiritual survival."¹⁶ Some of the highlights might appear, at first glance, somewhat ordinary.

But the ordinary is the miracle.
 Ordinary love and ordinary death,
 ordinary suffering, ordinary birth
 the ordinary couplets of our breath,
 ordinary heaven, ordinary earth . . . (*TH* 155)¹⁷

I have selected "ordinary" types as thematic Walcott figures. An allegorical use of biography to highlight friendship, persistence, courage: similar to medieval ideals, perhaps. Artistic integrity: as in the scholastic pursuit of the Renaissance. A Methodist heritage translated into the practice of painting and poetry: not unlike the praise of craft in other

religious traditions, both Christian and pagan. Can they be linked by observation as they are linked in the poem? Walcott's explicit references to prayer, praise, worship, and tradition are used metaphorically with all of these themes. They are integrated with his precise observations of history in ironic as well as synthetic ways. And they are better appreciated with some background detail, along with comparisons and close reading.

Some of the thematic highlights of *Tiepolo's Hound* will be arranged here using the following plan. The biographical treatment of Pissarro—how Walcott uses the Pissarro family history as an index of Caribbean history, as well as how Pissarro serves as Walcott's "predecessor" and as an allegorical figure of persistence and artistic integrity, is the most extensive device in the poem and will be considered first. A brief regard for the reproduced paintings in *Tiepolo's Hound* will note some connections with poetic subjects. Next, the anecdotal treatment of Veronese and the poetic narrator's "false memory" of one of Veronese's paintings will be addressed as necessary to following the threads of the poem. As with Pissarro's life, Veronese's actual story serves as a historical footnote, as well as allegorically as a type of artistic integrity and courage, as his painting becomes the basis for a "search" theme. This "search" is facilitated by rendering narrative incidental dogs as well as dogs represented in paintings, and is, ultimately, resolved in a context of charity, as well as through the greater anagogic framework. Finally, Walcott's "transformational" language will be noted as a way of highlighting his religious irony and consideration, and the attitudes toward prayer exhibited in the poem will be examined. These relate to his statements about art as craft and as prayer. The transformative metamorphosis of poetic images through multiple or sequential association extends through the title to the use of dogs as historic footnotes and for allusive purposes; these will follow last.

Camille Pissarro, Caribbean father of Impressionism

These little strokes whose syllables confirm
 an altering reality for vision
 on the blank page, or the imagined frame
 of a crisp canvas, are not just his own.

Tiepolo's Hound, Book Two XI. iii

Camille Pissarro was not the first world-recognized painter to be born in the Caribbean, but the origins of John James Audobon are probably not any better known.¹⁸ A 1996 newspaper article in a St. Thomas (Virgin Islands) newspaper announced an impending exhibit with the headline, “At Long Last, Camille Pissarro is Coming Home to St. Thomas” (Etsinger 1). The article noted many West Indian residents were probably not aware of the painter’s Caribbean origins and traced connections between Pissarro and his early mentor, Danish painter Fritz Melbye.

Walcott’s interest in and affinity with Pissarro, born about 500 miles northwest and one hundred years before him, would appear to concur with the comment by Paul Cézanne that “Pissarro had the good luck to be born in the Antilles. There he learned to draw without masters” (Shakes and Harper 30). However, Pissarro as a young shopkeeper’s son began a six year course of study in France at age eleven, where the school headmaster recognized his aptitude and encouraged him. Pissarro was to recall in later life the advice he received to “Draw from nature during your holidays—as many coconut trees as you can!” (Shakes and Harper 21), an imperative that not only anticipated *plein air* drawing, but likely enough also related to subjects he retrieved from memory to assuage homesickness. The artist’s origins

were complex.

In 1799 in the coastal city
of Bordeaux, in France, I, Joseph Pissarro,
your grandpere, was born. Anne Felicite Petit,
a Parisian, became my wife. Later, we go
with children and her brother, Isaac Petit,
to settle in St. Thomas... (*TH 22*)

Pissarro's grandfather crossed the Atlantic for the promise of New World prosperity. Jewish settlers on St. Thomas had built their first synagogue in 1796 and received members of a congregation fleeing nearby St. Eustatius following its military decimation by the English. The family established a successful general store and Isaac married a Creole girl but when she died her younger sister Rachel married the widower, according to Jewish custom.

These Uncle Isaac married, each in turn,
two sisters from the island of Dominica;
there is a lesson in there you should learn,
The spirit is weak, but the flesh is weaker. (*TH 22*)¹⁹

Isaac died in 1822 while Rachel was pregnant with their fourth child and Pissarro's future father, Frederic, left France to help manage her family's business. He became involved with this pregnant widow—his aunt—and married her after their own first child was born. This marriage was not initially recognized by their community or by rabbis in Copenhagen, London, or Paris. The King of Denmark, unaware of the precedents, acknowledged the marriage, a response reluctantly affirmed by the Hebrew Congregation in St. Lucia after the birth of the couple's fourth son—when Camille, the third child, was three years of age.

Many of the details in *Tiepolo's Hound* follow the outline of recorded events. When Walcott writes, "I shift his biography as he shifted houses / in his landscapes; not walled facts, their essence" (*TH* 70) he appears to refer to constructs of the poem which explore Pissarro's aesthetic responses to immediate stimuli. The poem includes an encounter between Pissarro and a waitress in a café with the disclaimer, "I painted this fiction" (*TH* 50). He generalizes Pissarro's Jewish background, not implying religious practice as an extant factor in Pissarro's life. Pissarro, seen in privileged retrospect, is a figure of artistic integrity, of persistence, and of friendship.

These are also keys to the artist's survival. The vocation of an artist is synonymous with struggle, interior and exterior. Under the guild system, the discipline and discovery of technique took place within a formal hierarchy financed by the powerful and wealthy. In contemporary culture, a free standing market forces the artist to formulate new means of survival as well as expression. Friendship remains an important dynamic of theory and craft, a mutual apprenticeship as it were, as well as a source of social nurturing. Walcott has enjoyed the close friendship of two other Nobel poets in his maturity, Joseph Brodsky and Seamus Heaney. In *Another Life* he recounted the important friendships and mentoring of his earlier years with regard to painting and writing, and opened the book with a quote from Malraux:

An old story goes that Cimabue was struck with admiration when he saw the shepherd boy, Giotto, sketching sheep. But, according to the true biographies, it is never the sheep that inspire a Giotto with the love of painting: but, rather, his first sight of the paintings of a man such as Cimabue.²⁰ (*AL* 3)

This theme is emphasized in Pissarro's life before as well as after Impressionism, within the

poem. The Danish painter Fritz Melbye became a primary artistic catalyst in Pissarro's life. Melbye had been commissioned to do botanical drawings in the islands and met Pissarro shortly after Pissarro's return from his educational sojourn in France, while working on a painting of the bay at Charlotte Amalie.

He walks with his mentor, Melbye, through the noise
of the radiant market, planning their flight. (*TH* 24)

The two realized a plan to try painting in South America and arrived in Venezuela in November 1852. Although work of the artists carries resemblances, Richard Brettell concludes that "direct comparison . . . leads one to suspect that . . . Pissarro's own artistic instincts were already comparatively well-developed before his association with the Danish painter" (Pissarro 25). From this standpoint, a detail of pedagogy such as "the light of threshing palms, whose fronds / Melbye urged him to master . . ." (*TH* 28) can be taken as part of Walcott's invention. The artistic adventure shared by the artists is accurately presented. "He and Melbye in fact fled to Venezuela, / and remained there for years" (*TH* 29). Pissarro produced almost two hundred drawings during the two-year stay. He parted with Melbye on friendly terms, although the Dane moved on to North America even as Pissarro determined to return to Paris.²¹

The story of Impressionism has nearly become its own allegory of survival in the annals of art history. Walcott effectively highlights the deep isolation of the artists and their need for kindred spirits. The roles of the principals are not always clear to their admirers. Pissarro was to some extent the center of the Impressionist group. After his experiences in Venezuela, Pissarro could encourage the painters "refused by the Salon" during his years in France. Pissarro's kindness and willingness to encourage other artists in the midst of his own

troubles extended throughout his life not only to his immediate circle of Cézanne, Renoir and Monet, but also later to his sons and their friends, younger artists looking for guidance.

When the “Impressionists” exhibits encountered problems of response and support, it was Pissarro who was called on and who took it upon himself to attempt to defend and unite the group. His role in this context was not unlike Walcott’s own attempt to build a community for professional Caribbean theater with his gift for writing, his ability to organize, his sense of discipline, and his belief in the potential of individual talent.

I thoroughly understand all he endures:
that sense of charity to a gifted stranger,

open to their gatherings, these voluble bores,
these brilliant jeerers. Friends are a danger,

proud of the tribal subtleties of their suffering,
its knot of meaning, of blood on the street

for an idea, their pain is privilege, a clear
tradition, proud in their triumph, prouder in defeat. (*TH* 136-7)

Friendship is not idealized in the poem as a romantic conceit, but as a gift with a price.

Walcott’s account especially illustrates the strong bond of Pissarro with Cézanne:

He and his friend Cézanne worked side by side
on a view of Louveciennes. They signed it together

in indistinguishable friendship. But deep inside,
Cézanne had moved further away, a change of weather

without a change of heart. Whatever they shared
was invaluable, incalculable; in the end

they were different, the pupil now dared

more than the master, without losing a friend. (*TH* 56)

The value of this relationship for Cézanne, who became a deeply isolated recluse as his life advanced, is documented. He acknowledged Pissarro's early influence not only as an artist, but as someone he could try to emulate. "Only then, when I knew Pissarro, who was tireless, did the taste for work come to me," he maintained. It was not only the way of painting landscape, of using outdoor light, that Pissarro was communicating but also "his patience, his receptivity to nature, his willingness to be still and listen to his inner sensations" (Shakes and Harper 118). This description of Cézanne's about Pissarro is not unlike Walcott's description of process to Edward Hirsch in 1985, "there is something votive and humble . . . And you can feel your own spirit waking." Nor is it unlike a description of Zen Buddhist meditation, Hindu contemplation, or aspects of Christian monasticism. Walcott continued his explanation with a comparison: "as they stand or sit over their blank paper, . . . in a sense, they are crossing themselves; I mean, it's like the habit of Catholics going into water: you cross yourself before you go in" (Baer 100). A striking contrast to this insight can be seen in the "materialistic" view of art skillfully interrogated by one of Pissarro's biographers.

There are moments, in the drawing rooms of affluent collectors, when . . . the jewels of the Impressionist movement seem to be a super-chattel, cut off from its origins. Securities literally gilt-edged . . . they constitute an ultimate stage of what Veblen once called "pecuniary emulation." Could anything be farther from the insecurity, challenge, labor and creative mess of the studio?

(Shakes and Harper 328)

Here is the very antithesis of Walcott's position. For Walcott, not only is art not a

commodity, but ultimately, as process, primarily serves the growth of the artist, rather than the appropriation of the audience. It is for the artist's "spiritual survival."

Walcott's extensive use of the Pissarro biography also functions as an allegory of persistence. In some ways, artistic parallels are closest between Pissarro's *painting* and Walcott's *writing*. Economics are one example—both offer the classic, mythic model of the artist as mendicant. As a married man of forty, Pissarro was still depending on handouts from his mother, supplemented by painting blinds, around the time he acquired his first dealer in 1869.²² Bruce King's biography traces Walcott's shifting fortunes with a very modest annual income at around the same point in his life, and a later point when he would receive half of that one year's income for a single reading.

There are documented sources for Walcott's lines on the low point in 1887 where the painter's wife, "crazed with debt," considers drowning the two youngest children. Her point of view is implied: "But none of this meant anything to their father / whose arrogance did nothing to accommodate / her desperation, which meant he would rather / they perished than pawn his work" (*TH* 63). In truth, Pissarro was caught in the fearful conviction that selling for too little would damage his future even further. And he had already developed a strong sense of his own limitation. In 1878 Pissarro reflected in a letter on his early decision to leave St. Thomas:

. . . employed in a well-paying business, I could not endure the situation any longer, and without thinking, I abandoned all I had there and fled to Caracas, thus breaking the bonds that tied me to bourgeois life. What I suffered is incredible, but I have lived: what I am suffering now is terrible, much worse even than when I was young, full of zeal and enthusiasm. Now I am

convinced that my future is dead. Yet I think that if I had to start all over again, I would follow the same path . . . The fact that I can't find an audience for my art doesn't prove at all that I would have been a successful businessman; Hell, I know how I would have made out, I would have gone bankrupt 2 or 3 times. (Pissarro 7)

The perceptive and self-questioning portrayal of Pissarro in *Tiepolo's Hound* aligns with this ruthless self-appraisal of a nature that values honesty as well as inspiration. But these qualities did not translate into widespread critical appreciation. Art critic Theodore Duret had published the opinion of Pissarro in 1875 that "he stamps his every canvas with a feeling for life," yet academic culture and the snobbery of the public continued to ensnare the artists (Shakes and Harper 85). "Critic Paul Mantz / reassured the public... 'There is no need to fear that ignorance / will ever become a virtue,' so the public resists" (TH 46).

This dimension of artistic integrity in the face of critical nearsightedness in the stories of the Impressionists is echoed at some points in Walcott's own career. *Tiepolo's Hound* uses "heretical" as ironic description:

They were heretical in their delight,
there was no deity outdoors, no altar,
in the rose window of the iris, light
was their faith, a shaft in an atelier. (TH 45)

This is "heresy" of a "Galilean" type, however. A fine Walcottian distinction: they did not delight in their heresy, but their delight in the "truth" of light was itself considered heretical.

The inspiration of the art itself maintains the artist. What is the source of this inspiration? Walcott's couplets distill the conflict: "...Painting was not enough. / Yet it is for

him the surest benediction / as the seasons sweep past, still his inheritance..." (TH 104). The shift to present tense emphasizes the endurance of art which fifty pages later becomes the author's own irony: "his canvases... fill these verses / with their own light, their walks, their weather / that will outlast me as they outlast him" (TH 156). This survival of art yields not only the longevity of fame for the author, but part of an allegory of integrity itself that lives on.

It was a painting of Pissarro's "Hoar-Frost" which received the debut attribution "Impressionist." The first name had been the "Intransigents," and the exhibit was compared unfavorably with children's drawings. Louis Leroy wrote his review as an imaginary discussion with a conservative painter.

Then, very quietly...I led him before the Ploughed Field [Hoar Frost] of M. Pissarro. At the sight of this astounding landscape, the good man thought that the lenses of his spectacles were dirty. He wiped them carefully...

"What on earth is that?"

"You see... a hoar-frost on deeply ploughed furrows."

"Those...? ...are palette-scrapings...It has neither head nor tail, neither top nor bottom, neither front nor back."

"Perhaps...but the impression is there!"

"Well, it's a funny kind of impression!" (Shakes and Harper 109-10)

Perspective had translated representation in terms of space; Impressionism translated visual experience using color. Pissarro's continuing experimentation, in fact, delayed his acceptance and commercial progress even more than others of the group. Unlike the photograph—ironically perceived as threat to the documentary purposes of painting just as

painting was reinventing itself—impressionism does not reproduce a visual experience in frozen, scrutable detail, but attempts to present an aesthetic and emotional visual experience that also accommodates the tendency of a spectator's gaze toward continual motion.

Historically, it paved the way for contemporary Western art. But this shift in perception took time to be acquired. Meanwhile, Pissarro found that his "Divisionism" experiments with color reduced his output with "a considerable tension of mind and a lot of work, I have to go into retreat within myself like the monks of the past, and quietly, patiently elaborate the oeuvre" (Pissarro 215) at the same time that critics easily dismissed the work as "unfinished" and Paul Durand-Ruel declined to try to sell it.

Walcott's technical persistence and integrity have received similar prominent critical witticisms such as Helen Vendler's reverberant "macaronic aesthetic" in her essay on *The Fortunate Traveller*—an essay with which Harold Bloom finds himself "in agreement" in his *Modern Critical Views* introduction. Rei Terada skillfully highlights some apparent critical inconsistencies within Vendler's own responses, as well as negative impressions that appear to contradict each other, from Vendler, Calvin Bedient, and Robert Benson.²³ Joseph Brodsky challenges Walcott's negative critical reception, charging that

the mental as well as spiritual cowardice, obvious in these attempts to render this man a regional writer, can be further explained by the unwillingness of the critical profession to admit that the great poet of the English language is a black man. It can also be attributed to completely busted helixes or bacon-lined retinæ. Still, its most benevolent expression is, of course, a poor knowledge of geography. (Bloom 37)

Among reviews of *Tiepolo's Hound*, John Kinsella's response appears to be

particularly skewed. Kinsella, an Australian poet and artist who teaches at Kenyon College, has written an essay on “A Brief Look at the Avant-Garde and ‘Western’ Spirituality” listing such considerations as “how form might or might not limit spiritual expression.” He elaborates specifically in terms of an expression of faith:

the presence or absence of not only a Godhead but a space for at least the possibility of faith has been at the core of poetry. The question of presence and absence is central to modernism... Poetry is a type of prayer, a type of prayer that works individually and collectively. (Kinsella, “A Brief”)

These remarks resonate so similarly with Walcott’s own that one might expect some affinity or implicit dialogue. As noted here, these considerations seem paramount to my reading not only of much of Walcott’s work, but quintessentially in *Tiepolo’s Hound*. Yet in his review Kinsella simply comments that “Walcott doesn’t do metatext ... particularly well” and adds “It would be nice to see more rage and less quiet” (Kinsella, “Doubting”).

In this critical respect, Walcott’s ultra-traditional forms and radical cultural *savoir* seem to have generated confused and reflexive, if not defensive, responses similar to those generated by the daring departures of the Impressionists.

How directly is the text linked with the paintings?

Tiepolo’s Hound is not the first collaboration between Walcott and Farrar Straus Giroux in a poetry and graphic arts combination; *The Caribbean Poetry of Derek Walcott and the Art of Romare Bearden* (1983) included poems by Walcott and lithographs designed by the New York artist whose work employs a “collage” approach and is included in

collections from the Metropolitan Museum of Art to the Des Moines Art Center. Bearden had a home in St. Maarten, and the origin of a 1997 traveling exhibition at the Smithsonian of 73 works by 56 Caribbean artists in the Caribbean was traced in a *Washington Post* article to a 1970s observation by Bearden who “complained that he could never find anything in print about the island artists.”

Although Walcott’s style of painting is thoroughly representational, it is not strictly realist; in terms of hue, it is scaled between primitive and impressionist or even Fauve, although Caribbean subjects inhabit a rich range of color the “wild beasts” had to “invent” in Europe (“If I pitched my tints to a rhetorical excess...” *TH* 98). Colors are placed next to one another in strong contrast—in fact there is delight in contrast characteristic of Edward Hopper’s work, for example, although the compositional strategy could not be more different. Walcott uses color almost as interlocking puzzle pieces. The values are often at their brightest and most elemental, with the intensity of Matisse, and as flat. It is a landscape in France (St. Malo 40 / 41), in which the color disappears; here is an interesting study of architecture, yet it almost seems a parody in such a color-saturated collection to find a near-monochrome. Walcott’s wit is not limited to language.

A recurring “horizontal” quality emphasized in several horizons, and/or horizontal shapes which extend nearly the full width of the composition, departs from the compositional gospel of diagonals. A certain underlying serenity is suggested. This influence takes surprising turns in the text: “a settlement of Abyssinian apostles, / bearded as smoke, have founded a religion / based on the horizon” (*TH* 131). The reproductions are complementary to the artist’s poetic exposition of subjects and process, views of a Caribbean “home,” people, colors, and light, yielding an aesthetic and intellectual synergy. The style is not

necessarily anachronistic, even though we might see this style as impressionistic. Even if it were, there are respected contemporary painters who are characterized as Impressionist, working in California and elsewhere.

Although the strongest allegorical parallels link Renaissance or Impressionist artists and Walcott as writer, some comparisons are possible with the plastic artists he is writing about and the paintings in the book. Besides the allegorical narratives and stylistic comparisons of color, a review of artworks suggests the underlying importance of a particular subject: the value of recreation and rest in a community. In terms of formal composition, one painting in particular poses multiple comparisons with the poem's artist protagonists. Figures seated at the table in Walcott's "Domino Players" (1999, 106/107) are not unlike the figures at the table in Pissarro's "Cardplayers in Galipan," dating from 1854. In both paintings, the player at the table facing the viewer is resting his head on one hand. The angle of the right arm of the player in the left corner of each composition is nearly identical, and even the shirt sleeves are similar. Pissarro has twelve figures wearing hats, while there are nine hatted figures in the Domino painting. But the middle figure of Walcott's painting, and the geometry of the background, is closer to Cézanne's treatment of card players. The appropriation of Cézanne's "sections" with Pissarro's figures allows Walcott the strengths of both and allows the complex arrangement of portraits to remain immediately legible.

The subject also represents unusual departures from their usual repertoire for both Cézanne and Pissarro, although not for Walcott, who depicts leisure in several paintings and opens his poem with a heightened awareness of the idea of Sabbath. Later in the poem, however, the subject will be treated ironically, and practice will supersede purpose in Paris as "a city that worships Sundays, parks, and prams" (*TH* 42). Walcott is encyclopedic in his

discernment of hypocrisy.

Recreational leisure can be devalued as incidental, but in Western communal religious tradition recreation is considered an important component in a balanced life. Pissarro often painted figures occupied in some form of work, but rarely in recreational leisure. And although Cézanne did few figures, with some rare family exceptions, he completed multiple treatments of the “Card Players” subject. A painting in the museum at Aix-en-Provence, which has a formal composition reminiscent of a family portrait, is thought to be the possible starting idea for Cézanne. Different versions varied from five figures until finally Cezanne reduced the composition to two figures in his best known “Card Players” which hangs in the Louvre. The Metropolitan Museum in New York holds a version with four figures, and a five-figure version is located at the Barnes Foundation in Pennsylvania. Both of these have a middle character at the table facing the viewer and a standing observer with arms folded, which could be forerunners of Walcott’s man in shirtsleeves. It is Cézanne’s two card players, with their geometrically defined background such as is used to create compositions within compositions in Walcott’s “Dominoes” painting, which Meyer Schapiro finds to be “the image of a pure contemplativeness without pathos” (18). Walcott’s choice of subjects is echoed in his characterization of Pissarro as well: “War was a subject for Meissonier and Delacroix, / his skill was not in such fury, he painted peace” (*TH* 75)

Craft as prayer

Walcott foregrounded the importance of craft early in his writing: “until I have learnt to suffer / in accurate iambs” (“Prelude” *CP* 3). His interviews reflect a similar emphasis: “If you get a chance to paint a knuckle on a painting by Leonardo, then you say, “Thank God!” and you just paint a knuckle as well as you can” (Baer 32). *Tiepolo’s Hound* celebrates the imagined maintenance of Cezanne’s paintbrushes. “I thought how clean his brushes were!” (*TH* 7). This attention to craft has added significance for Walcott as well.

In 1985 during a *Paris Review* interview with Edward Hirsch, Walcott shared a consideration which editor William Baer also used in the introduction to his collection *Conversations with Derek Walcott*: “There are some things people avoid saying in interviews because they sound pompous or sentimental or too mystical. I have never separated the writing of poetry from prayer” (99). Prayer, in this artistically represented universe as well, is considered to be ordinary human activity symptomatic of faith—or confronting the shadows of doubt, or superstition. “...Claude, / David, and the Venetian schools presumed / a privilege given by the gods or God” (*TH* 43). Walcott’s “melting the lagoon with alchemy where sky and water join” (*TH* 115) may seem “romantic”²⁴ but his chemistry of nature consistently progresses toward an act of faith: “the light that brims and glistens in Millais’s work were like my mother’s belief in triumph over affliction” (*TH* 12). Likewise “The soul as indivisible as air” (*TH* 160) could be read as a “metaphysical” but such a view could not encompass Walcott’s references to Jewish tradition, such as “the pallor of Time from the Torah” (*TH* 104), or Catholicism: “her canoes genuflecting for Communion

/ before the lace-fringed altar of a wave... the Mass in Latin" (*TH* 130).

In terms of Pissarro's biography, this theme of prayer could be viewed as the area where Walcott has taken the greatest interpretive liberty: "If Heaven meant to take Jeanne, his angel, early, / it was Heaven's will: which meant that it was good" (*TH* 83). Here Walcott as artist directly presents his case of art as an inherently religious act. "His paintings have the meditative progress / of a secular pilgrim, praising its larks and elms" (*TH* 66). The same metaphor encompasses the mourning of his young daughter Jeanne, as Pissarro paints a dusk: "with calm, even / paint he built its blue. This was the way he prayed" (*TH* 86).

In narrow terms, Walcott's metaphors could be considered impositions, but they also appear to coincide with some of Pissarro's own ideas. Doubt could cause Pissarro to write that he sometimes found his work "horrible," but in better moments he could also reflect that "Painting, art in general, enchants me. It is my life. What else matters? When you put all your soul into a work, all that is noble in you, you cannot fail to find a kindred soul who understands you, and you do not need a host of such spirits. Is not that all an artist should wish for?" (Shakes and Harper 188).

If Pissarro becomes allegorical in the context of *Tiepolo's Hound*, if his own life as an artist takes on the aspect of "prayer" as an act of belief, if his artistic integrity makes everyday life potentially heroic, it is Walcott who has made Pissarro "devout" and heroic. Were a similar freedom employed to catalog Walcott's expression, using his apostrophes and metaphors, a parallel might be extended using the formal steps listed in the Carmelite catechism of prayer ("one may feel perfectly free... to follow any order in which the steps spontaneously suggest themselves"; Gabriel, 14), since these steps are all included in Walcott's own process: Preparation, Reading, Meditation, Thanksgiving, Oblation, and

Petition. "Preparation" is sacramental in this rendering, as in "The unblest rituals of preparation / Running tapwater over paint-crusts cells" (TH 97). "Reading" is rife in his metaphors as with "Landscape as theatre" (TH 43) and "Fragile little booklets, reproductions in monochrome, RENOIR, DÜRER, several Renaissance masters" (TH 13). We have "Meditation": "no history, but the sense of narrative time / annihilated in the devotion of the acolyte" (TH 58). There is evident "Thanksgiving": "For leaves and houses, thanks" (TH 163). There is an act of apparent "Oblation": "Devour the last crumbs of Time, crusts and leftovers, / like the curved wolfhound at Tiepolo's feast, // glad for a privilege, before the embroidered covers / are folded and the waves' timbrels have ceased" (TH 100). And there is direct authorial "Petition": "Help me to begin / when I set out again..." (TH 161). Yet, the text is loaded with religious irony, transposed onto artistic process.

If I pitched my tints to a rhetorical excess,
it was not from ambition but to touch the sublime,
to heighten the commonplace into the sacredness
of objects made radiant by the slow glaze of time. . . (TH 98)

Here, a conventionally sacred text: "the place where the cloud stood still, there the children of Israel *pitched their tents*" Numbers 9: 17 has been shifted toward near-parody. The second line's ending marks Walcott's own emphasis on the "sublime" as a goal beyond the comic. This paraphrase of scripture may not be transcendent comedy, but it is evidence of the conscious linking of devotion to painting. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* William James makes the comment, "In my last lecture I quoted to you the ultra-radical opinion of Mr. Havelock Ellis, that laughter of any sort may be considered a religious exercise, for it bears witness to the soul's emancipation" (James 89).

As in his art, Walcott makes precise distinctions in his conversant commentary about humor and how he views it, as in a 1990 interview with J. P. White, which itself seems to carry elements of its subject:

I don't think comedy is an element of poetry, not because it's beneath poetry, but because there's something beyond comedy, and that's the sublime... Life ultimately becomes sublime. It becomes sublime through faith, which may be faith in God or faith in poetry, and the ways are inseparable, even if one may appear to be an agnostic poet or an atheistic poet. Now, you can make jokes about God, certainly. One presumes [God] has a sense of humor. But ultimately, God is not a joke, and poetry is not a joke for that reason. (Baer 170)²⁵

The method of constructing sublimity is practical, in Walcott's terms. He reflected in a 1985 interview with Edward Hirsch on his Methodist background as a "quiet, pragmatic" faith, a "practical thing of conduct" which led into the idea that "at this period of my life and work, I think of myself in a way as a carpenter, as one making frames, simply and well" (Baer 101). Perhaps, in looking for a bridge between carpenter and epiphany, one might inquire whether song enters into the equation.

While his craftsman's explanation verbalizes structure, it also allows for a music room addition, next to the studio. Unlike William Logan, who stops at the structure—"what you remember in Walcott is texture, never the text" (Breslin, *Nation* 291)—Paula Burnett finds the "texture" a way of drawing the reader: "In a very real sense, the power of Walcott's language, as music, is enough to carry us until we are able to reach other levels of meaning" (320). Burnett's estimate that "His work indeed can be regarded as an extended praise-song"

is borne out by the opening of *Tiepolo's Hound*:

They stroll on Sundays down Dronningens Street,
passing the bank and the small island shops,
quiet as drawings, keeping from the heat
through Danish arches until the street stops... (TH 3)

The drumbeat of the “d’s” in the first line combined with the strumming of the “str” combinations, the greeting-long vowels in “They” and “Sundays,” the repeating solfeggio-like consonants, “stroll,” “small,” “isle,” provide rhythm and vocal quality echoing in “Dronningens / drawings”. There is also acoustic pleasure in the “framing” consonant combination surprising a phrase using “passing” and “shops.” The intercept rhyme of (until the) “street” with “heat” in the line before is also resonant. All of these, by their density, set off the aural “quiet” and the movement of “through”—all are musical. The cumulative combination of political consciousness, representational craft, and linguistic celebration results in a technique that creates a profound impression.

In *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott also uses the contrast of a counter theme—the failure of memory. If “spiritual survival” is the soul’s desire, in *Tiepolo's Hound*, the allegorical “villain” is the “erasure” of history presented metaphorically, psychologically as a trick of memory, historically as recurrent reference to the Inquisition, as well as within other political and critical battles. Walcott sees the craft of art as the solution to this threat. He presents his own writing as evidence against erasure.

Before continuing, one more comparison may be made between Walcott’s technique and a description of Impressionism from Arnold Hauser’s four-volume *History of Art*:

The very colors which impressionism uses alter and distort those of our

everyday experience. We think for example, of a piece of “white” paper as white in every lighting, despite the coloured reflexes which it shows in ordinary daylight. In other words: the “remembered colour” . . . which is the result of long experience and habit, displaces the concrete impression gained from immediate perception; impressionism now goes back behind the remembered, theoretically established colour to the real sensation, which is, incidentally, in no sense a spontaneous act, but represents a supremely artificial and extremely complicated psychological process. (Vol. 4, 163)

Hauser’s exposition could be superimposed whole onto Walcott’s perceptions of not only the colors of nature but the colors of history and language.

Pissarro’s family background introduces the theme of “erasure”

To understand Walcott’s use of the *famille* Pissarros’ experience as a link to Jewish historical referents at the beginning of the poem and throughout its entire imagery requires more than Pissarro’s own biographical details. Jacob Camille Pissarro’s great-great grandfather Pierre was born in Braganza or Braganca, Portugal, in the early eighteenth century. A Sephardic Jew, he was forced to leave, with his wife Louisa, and moved to Bordeaux, France. The first ghettos had been created in Spain, a gesture of Catholic monarchy to address Iberian religious conflict between Muslims, Jews, and Christians that had taken root after Visigoth conquest. The Reformation fed their panic, and in March 1492 King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella signed an edict at Alhambra recounting previous attempts to impose restrictions (“we gave them juderias” –aljamas, or ghettos) and

banishing “all Jews and Jewesses dwelling within the confines of our kingdom, never to return” (Lewis A. Tambs in Kayserling 47). In 1497 Portugal began evicting all its Jewish population, including those who had arrived five years before, and in 1536 initiated an Inquisition.²⁶

Caribbean history reflects, perhaps even more than European history, dramatic political motives disguised as religion. Columbus’ writings include a “Libro” (*Libro de las profecias*) which presents Scriptural support for his intent of what may be viewed as a sort of apocalyptic conquest: “Here begins the book...on the subject of the recovery of God’s holy city and Mount Zion...” (Avalos in Le Beau 68). One interpretation of this would be that Columbus’ ultimate goal was to raise enough money from his expeditions to finance the capture of Jerusalem. He shared this dream, from a vastly different perspective, with many “conversos” (forced converts) who dreamed of emigration to Jerusalem. The Pissarros, in fact, had apparently hidden their religion; one of the forebears had received a Papal commendation. An entire section of this book, which he had hoped to transform into poetry, concerns “islands” as the furthest reach of potential converts, and he lists Scriptural island references such as Isaiah 51:5 “The islands shall look for me” and Jeremiah 31:10 “Hear the word of the Lord...and declare it in the islands” (Avalos 68). Columbus’ *Libro* also includes a Scriptural indicator for future policy—“Appoint a lawgiver over them” which serves as the basis for his immediate response upon encountering the first natives, recorded in his journal: “They should make good slaves . . . I believe that they will easily become Christian” (Avalos 68).

There was a settlement in North Africa, São Tomé (“St. Thomas”), that the Portuguese used as an early deportation destination for Jews unwilling to accept baptism. Some researchers of diaspora history believe there were native Africans who came to the

New World with knowledge of Jewish customs, especially the Ashanti in Jamaica, and that settlement in the islands included European Jews who arrived by way of Africa (Baron Volume XV, p. 354).

Indeed the imagery of the Torah or the Pentateuch became symbolic of the hope of Africans in the Americas. In the final sections of *Tiepolo's Hound* is an echo of Psalm 137: 4-6, the famous hymn of exile: "it was there that they asked us, our captors, for songs... Oh let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not, if I prize not Jerusalem above all my joys!"

Out of the open window, the tall palms dream
of Zion, the thick clouds graze like sheep,
"If I forget thee. . ." Children share childhood. See him,
one oven-hot afternoon when parents sleep,
stretched out on a straw carpet, an innocent
studying the freight train of a millipede
before the world into which we are sent
stings with each poisonous and different creed. (TH 143)

A vivid contrast is set up here between children and "creed" emphasized by associative links with children as portrayed in some scriptural writing²⁷ and also with associations of the "oven hot afternoon." The "creeds" are not only religious but political, although the two are sometimes aggressively blended.

For example, after the introduction of the Inquisition at the literal, historic level on the first page of *Tiepolo's Hound*, the topic re-appears when we realize that the painting Walcott was thinking of at the beginning of the poem has been condemned by the Inquisition.

Illumination, and erasure: Multiple narratives in the Veronese painting “Feast in the House of Levi”

“In the same moment that this narration comes into being it creates what it is narrating.”

Maurice Blanchot

Near the beginning of *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott-as-narrator recounts a first trip to a New York museum. Here is the “definitive” encounter with the hound of the title, a predominant invention of the poem. The implications opening the poem, that we are witness to the early life and family background of a French impressionist painter, are pushed back to the sixteenth century. The narrator’s trip also prefigures Pissarro’s return to Paris and the Louvre—“The Old World lay ahead, the New receding” (*TH* 30)—later in the poem. Thus, multiple narratives are established in one “invented moment”. If Walcott’s imagery and cross-reference sometimes seem like Russian dolls, or Chinese boxes, one inside another, this particular surprise grouping suggests the Chinese box called a “hierarchy.” Instead of just one box inside the larger box, a whole set of boxes is contained within; and inside each of these is not just one box, but another set.

This “invented moment” yields a possible interpretation as spiritual, an “epiphanic” moment. But immediately accompanying the “revelation” are a number of interlocking or overlapping ironies. First, two new “parallel” painters, Tiepolo and Veronese, both attempting to bring “heaven to earth,” are introduced—and are confused with each other. Second, the “Hound” which comes to represent the “chase” of life, appears—but rather than a hound as representing a chase, the hound itself becomes the object of a “search.” Third,

historic revision and religious anecdote are contained within style and subjects. Fourth, the Inquisition returns. Fifth, an error of memory: erasure becomes not only historic, but psychological.

Although these associations are listed here in somewhat the order they would be identified in the poem's narrative, they will be considered in slightly different sequence, to group considerations strictly related to the painting itself. Then the question of "erasure" as it relates to these narratives will be addressed. Finally, the "hound" of the painting, related to dogs throughout, will be interpreted.

But first, the "moment of heightened consciousness." In the third section of the opening chapter, Walcott describes the associations of new sightings of paintings with the phrase reminiscent of a moment in Genesis: "Across that distance light was my first lesson" (*TH* 7). "I remember stairs in couplets" is the next line, exactly synchronizing writer with reader on the steps. These prepare the way for a moment in which everything stops.

. . . I remember being
stunned as I studied the exact expanse
of a Renaissance feast, the art of seeing. (*TH* 7)

"The art of seeing" provides a link between this passage and the previous association of the beginning experiences of the Impressionist painter Pissarro. From that starting point the new narrative moves both forward and backward in time simultaneously—from Pissarro towards both the Renaissance and twentieth century New York—leading to an artistic "revelation" or "epiphanic" experience, the joy of discovery.

Then I caught a slash of pink on the inner thigh
of a white hound entering the cave of a table,

so exact in its lucency at The Feast of Levi,
I felt my heart halt. (TH 7)

The rhythm here closes around the last syllable. The detail suddenly becomes incidentally greater than the sum of its parts. The reader is invited to participate, with a sense that even the invented narrator may not quite understand the force of the response. Besides the actual history of the painting, there is a psychological or spiritual basis for reading the account of the encounter that provides its own “lucency.”

From a literary perspective, this is the kind of Joycean epiphany that imitates the Irishman’s drawing of the divine into everyday experience. Joyce appropriated the very word “epiphany” and its associative source in Christian tradition, a vision of Christ, Moses, and Elijah experienced on a mountaintop: Joyce translated the story to the scope of a receptive person in the right circumstance. The description of the “moment” in *Tiepolo’s Hound* echoes a similar example written by Walcott in “Another Life” of “a trance” where he experiences “a serene extinction of all sense” (AL 43). Such renditions are not outside another part of William James’ discussion, as he uses a quote by Walt Whitman to characterize what James guesses

was probably with him a chronic mystical perception: “There is,” he writes, “apart from mere intellect, in the make-up of every superior human identity, a wondrous something that realizes without argument . . . an intuition of the absolute balance, in time and space, of the whole of this . . . incredible make-believe and general unsettled-ness, we call the world; a soul-sight of that divine clue and unseen thread which holds the whole congeries of things, all history and time, and all events, however trivial, however momentous, like a

leashed dog in the hand of the hunter.” (James 432)

This is not to “expand” or “reduce” the description, ultimately, but only to comment on its effect. It would not be inappropriate for such an experience to take place before a painting that was originally referred to by its immediately recognizable subject, *The Last Supper*, creatively renamed to circumvent the Inquisition in Venice. It might also be considered that the misattribution that engages the narrator further on is partly the logical wish of a rational mind to explain the inexplicable, whatever kind of blanks that may involve filling.

. . . Nothing, not the babble

of the unheard roar that rose from the rich
pearl-lights embroidered on ballooning sleeves,

sharp beards, and gaping goblets, matched the bitch
nosing a forest of hose. So a miracle leaves

its frame, and one epiphanic detail
illuminates an entire epoch:

a medal by Holbein, a Vermeer earring, every scale
of a walking mackerel by Bosch, their sacred shock. (TH 7-8)

An ironic footnote follows the initial euphoria of this remarkable memory: the visitor has misremembered the painting.

There are five distinct ironies in this episode. One initial question that arises is how the painting was mistakenly attributed to Tiepolo. To begin with, both Veronese and Tiepolo were major exponents of Venetian painting. Veronese extended High Renaissance mannerism to a transcendent perspective with luminous color, mythically idealized figures, and fantastic illusory effects in work such as the ceiling paintings for the Church of San

Sebastiano in Venice. One hundred years later, Tiepolo pushed these experiments to new Baroque heights in a fantastically successful career which included ceilings for palaces and churches, chapel decoration, and other major private and church commissions, culminating in the state palace in Wurzburg from 1750-1753 for Prince Bishop Karl Philipp von Greinffenklau and the ceiling of the throne room for Charles III of Spain. His trademarks are expansive, dramatically lit spaces, virtuoso handling of radiant pastel colors, and postures and perspective which defy gravity. Although dogs appear in his paintings, and are of course signifiers of social rank, they appear in hindsight almost satirical, since the entire impression he intended to create for his patrons was a “dog’s-eye view” for those entering their palaces.

Walcott plays on the celestial quality of this artist “whose light is always a little before sunset” (*TH* 126). He gently satirizes religious art throughout his work, in careful observations on the varying distance between religious stimuli and actual prayer; in *Another Life* he opens one section “Our father, who floated in the vaults of Michelangelo” (44) which as social observation extends well beyond autobiography. It is about the effect of art on the viewer, as well as an illustration of the paradoxical human tendency to desire a spirituality that is accessible in the senses, as when Pissarro is mourning the death of his young daughter: “false yet paradisal, the joy we find / in a Tiepolo ceiling, its clear belief / in faith as colour” (*TH* 83). Here Walcott relinquishes both art and paradise in favor of faith—to counter-balance grief—shifting with the pronoun “we” from Pissarro’s longing for consolation to that sort of faith which understands with a laugh its own false steps, the quintessential paradox of a prayerfully objective poet. The most extended continuation of this irony is presented on a speaker’s trip to Europe full of musings:

. . . they continue at sixty-seven

to echo in the corridors of the head; perspectives
 of a corridor in the Vatican that led, not to Heaven,
 but to more paintings of Heaven, ideas in sieves
 drained by satiety, because great art can exhaust us,
 and even the steadiest faith can be clogged by excess,
 the self-assured Christs, the Madonnas' inflexible postures. (*TH* 110)

With the kind of deadly accurate wit often attributed to Christ himself in the Gospels,²⁸
 Walcott correctively reflects artistic distortion from subject to object.

The second irony of the Veronese identification is narrative: the “low” subject, a dog looking for food under the table, with the single brushstroke that “creates” the top of its leg as revelation for the poem’s observer. Besides being a nod to craft, this is also, as will be described further in the discussion on dogs, a possible hint of a parable.

Another irony is referential: the painting is of the Last Supper, but the forced change of title has refashioned the work, into a celebration in a wealthy Jewish household. As in postcolonial literature of magical realism, what is happening in a given account may differ greatly depending on who is telling the story. “The Feast in the House of Levi” refers to a “last big party” before Levi—also known as Matthew, whose surname indicates he was of the priestly descendants of the Twelve Tribes, but who was acting as a hated tax collector for the Romans when he was called by the radical Jew now known as Christ to “follow” him—held a celebration feast at his home in transition to his new role.

The fourth irony is a matter of court record: the painting was renamed because the Inquisition found the dog an example of “irreverence” incompatible with the subject of the Last Supper.

. . . I heard this later
 from waves that whispered: Paolo Caliari Veronese,
 a sculptor's son, was for Feast in the House of Levi
 charged by the Inquisition for irreverence. (*TH* 122)

This detail is artistically accentuated by “the self-assured Christs, the Madonnas inflexible postures.” The painting’s superimposed anachronisms also invite comment that the Renaissance and much religious art anticipates formal preoccupations now called “modern” or “postmodern” with regard to transposing or juxtaposing time and place in a single work.²⁹ Within such a wide perspective, Breslin finds the technique of “writing with Victorian amplitude at the dawn of the twenty-first century” as a possible “instance of postmodern polystylistics” in terms of Walcott implying a possible indictment of critics who have not recognized his work (*Nation* 292).

The audience of the Inquisition found Veronese’s painting “irreverent” due to the inclusion of “buffoons, drunkards, Germans, dwarfs, and other such scurrilities” (West 432). The concern about “Germans” along with drunkards and dwarfs indicates a counter-Reformation panic similar to that with which the Spanish throne initiated the exodus of the Pissarro from Europe. Veronese was told to paint the dog over with the figure of a repentant Mary Magdalene. He was forced to give testimony in the courtroom of the Inquisition, which he did clumsily, but instead of repainting the work, he changed the title. The story provides a remarkable example of critical appraisal overlapping religious persecution, and of artistic integrity outmaneuvering both.

The fifth irony is psychological, experiential, or spiritual, having to do with the “powers of the soul”: The narrator remembers a painting detail that does not exist, besides

thinking the work to be by a different artist than the one who actually painted it. The painting, *The Feast at the House of Levi*, is in Venice, at the Accademia, and measures sixteen feet five inches by forty-two feet; and although the poet had identified it from the Metropolitan and painted by Tiepolo, the work is by Veronese.³⁰ The dog under the table is not white and does not elicit the same reaction in a follow-up search, according to the poem; there are, however, two dogs in the Veronese, and the one going under the table has highlights defining its legs.³¹ Does life inevitably suffer the danger of becoming a sort of optical illusion, a mis-remembered moment? This problem of memory called “misattribution” links with the history of the Caribbean and the diaspora, and its erasure of history.

Taken together, these themes provide an ironic context from which Walcott pushes the text outward. The most recognizable example of the Holbein medal mentioned in the poem just after the epiphany of the Renaissance feast—“a medal by Holbein, a Vermeer earring, every scale / of a walking mackerel by Bosch, their sacred shock” (*TH* 8)—would be Hans Holbein the Younger’s portrait of Henry VIII, hardly an icon of reverence in itself to produce “sacred shock” although the workmanship (and indeed the biography) well might; the “walking mackerel by Bosch” with the “Vermeer earring” reappear together, metamorphosed, 36 pages later: “The metallic shine of a gaping mackerel, the ring in its dead eye like a Vermeer earring” (*TH* 44). Besides the interesting use of an eye as metaphor for an earring, the first “walking” mackerel has now been asphyxiated. The immediate association with Vermeer’s most-reproduced masterpiece in the first instance, of the huge pendant pearl in “Girl With a Pearl Earring” would not fit the second description, which must be generalized to “The Concert” or another Vermeer portrait.

These are plausible as separate associations from their first appearance—memory often creates “lists”—but their very fineness of distinction and changes of association in the text mimic the problem of confusing Veronese with Tiepolo, of remembering a white dog which does not appear in the “right” painting. The variety of these mnemonic failures and triumphs reinforces the subject of transmutations of memory that riddle our lives, and that also allow or create or excuse history’s distortions—more culpable in some cases than others.

“Erasure” in Caribbean history, and misattribution of the painting

History does not exist apart from the historian. —Vladimir Nabokov

Painting as well as writing necessarily concerns itself with ways of representing the surface so as to inquire what is beneath. In *Tiepolo’s Hound* the misremembered painting which initiates the search for a dog, besides characterizing a quest, may also be seen as a exploration of the psychological question of distortion and erasure. Walcott profiles the Dreyfus affair in the poem, which epitomizes the process of “misattribution.” Misattribution is the process of remembering wrongly, or even remembering something that did not happen, although Dreyfus’ scapegoating as a Jew was deliberate. Besides being a common experience and a progressively recurrent one, it also has implications beyond historic distortion, linked with prejudice or suggestion; for example, it is a phenomenon that continues to create very real problems in courtrooms. In the context of *Tiepolo’s Hound*, misattribution is not only personal but also metaphorical. The issue has a particular resonance in the Caribbean, in which genealogical legitimacy is a rarity if not nonexistent further back than a couple of generations in many cases, and where literary “memory” seems

to have been haunted for many years by the battle with the mantra of Froude that “no one” exists there.

At the personal level, outside of the political arena which can threaten the truth and function of life, the question remains: Does life inevitably suffer the danger of becoming a sort of optical illusion, a mis-remembered moment? How powerful or effective is art—or for that matter, life—if our best record of it turns out to be incorrect?

Does the misremembered painting ultimately function as counterpoint to all of the artist’s persistence and courage? Does it undermine “plot?” In Walcott’s terms, it does not. In an interview with Edward Hirsch in 1985, Walcott directly linked the problem, the issue that art is ephemeral, with his approach to it—as a prayer, as a daily task, as craft:

To me there are always images of erasure in the Caribbean—in the surf which continually wipes the sand clean, in the fact that those huge clouds change so quickly . . . If you have to be in a place where you create your own time, what you learn, I think, is patience, a tolerance, how to make an artisan of yourself rather than being an artist.” (Baer 108)

This is the challenge, and the gift of the artist. Memory may be insubstantial, but craft is not, in terms of experience, and art makes use of a fresh start.

“See I make all things new” (*Rev. 21: 5*)

In the Book of Revelation, “new heavens” and a “new earth” are distinct from the beginning of the story, in which “everything” is spoken into being out of “nothing.” There is a shift from creation, as it were, to craft. This is the way Walcott, too, uses metaphor and

syntax to shift our perceptions. “It’s a process . . . which has to be historical, and which also has to be, eventually, spiritual in a sense” (Baer 203).

Walcott uses the syntactic ambiguity of poetry as a means of historic synthesis which can represent its own “new beginning.” As *Tiepolo’s Hound* opens, “They,” the first word, referring to the promenade of the Pissarros, shift their (or our) attention to a sound that, far enough away, could be either waves or actual singing—

the salt breeze brings the sound of Mission slaves
chanting deliverance from all their sins

in tidal couplets of lament and answer,
the horizon underlines their origins—

Pissarros from the ghetto of Braganza
who fled the white hoods of the Inquisition . . . (TH 3)

An initial reading of the syntax would interpret “their origins” in terms of the Mission slaves. The punctuation allows this connection. Then, however, “their origins” becomes alternatively an identifier of “Pissarros from the ghetto of Braganza”—on the strength of an equally logical syntax. “Their origins” as referent to the Pissarro’s exodus is reinforced by succeeding lines and the couplet structure. The ambiguity by then has done its work, and made “their origins” convergent for Pissarros and slaves.

Jim Hannan places distance between readers tending to oppose the “romantic” and the “historic,” in Walcott’s work, but demonstrates Walcott’s formal strategy as a means to “making form fit his own aesthetic and intellectual requirements.” He highlights the example of the rhyming of “waves” with “slaves.”

Rhyme simultaneously evokes the postcolonial gesture . . . and subordinates it

to a formal, literary moment. In Walcott's treatment of the Caribbean here, the wave . . . is merely a detail in a landscape that the eye notices because of those airborne gulls, but is also a potent element, by way of the well-placed rhyme, in the notorious Middle Passage. (Hannan 567-8)

Walcott's layers of metaphor use processes of nature or works of art to represent points of view, in palimpsests of identity and identification. For example, cross-references of perception, race, history and belief are made in

. . . the sunlit net of maps whose lanes contain
a spectral faith, white as the mongrel's ghost . . . (TH 5)

"Lanes," which simultaneously reference everyday streets as well and the Atlantic traffic of slavery, are linked with a "spectral" faith (which is also "white") and provide habitation for the roaming dogs—which unwittingly act as reminders of animals once used as trackers. The couplet also yields what can be read as a pun on the predecessor of the Holy Spirit, the "Holy Ghost."³²

Yet, these precisely painful associations are offset by the visually surprising and psychologically interesting evocation of a "sunlit net of maps" (TH 5). The contrast between the slavery of "civilization" and the raw experience of "nature" is a quandary for as far back as *Exodus*. Walcott's life experience places him in a singularly strategic spot from which to record the paradox. He sometimes contrasts artistic achievement and some of the horror of history in order to highlight the irony, as he does in *Tiepolo's Hound* with Renaissance frescoes and the Inquisition, Impressionism, and the Dreyfus affair. When Walcott depicts

Pissarro from the ghetto of Braganza

who fled the white hoods of the Inquisition
 for the bay's whitecaps, for the folding cross
 of a white herring gull over the Mission
 droning its passages from Exodus . . . (TH 3)

following a few lines after "Mission slaves," he places both the Jewish diaspora and the history of the slaves in contrast to the "white hoods" which in turn alternate with the "white" of a gull. This image from nature is perceived by the artist as a "folding cross" that becomes, besides a visual metaphor, a transformation of the cross as symbol. It could even be seen as a merging of the symbol of the cross with the traditional "white dove" representation of the holy spirit. The "cross" is suddenly rhetorically "cleansed," in a single poetic act, of the historic, as well as symbolic and metaphoric, distortion contained in the word Inquisition, and the word "white" itself is similarly shifted.

Seen at close range, Walcott's invention becomes a crafting of "truth," grounded by the "Adamic" quality of nature as perceived in "nature-nurtured" experience. Such coordinates map what Walcott has called in one poem a "nation of the imagination."³³ His "nation" as seen in *Tiepolo's Hound* and elsewhere could be read as the answer to a search begun in some 1960's quarters for "a theology of the imagination" (Scott xvii).

The changing of the dogs

The approach of medieval Christendom to the canine species represents a combination of the biblical (i.e. basically a negative perspective) and the classical heritage (essentially positive). 'Commenting upon the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-25), Ambrose of Milan...blessed dogs "that represent those who guard the flock and protect it against the wolves...[and] keep guard for their masters' safety"'

Sophia Menache quoting Mary Theresa Springer,
Nature Imagery in the works of Saint Ambrose

The poet is a shepherd of being.
The poet is the one who keeps the archives of the stones,
And makes immortal the lady among the rocks
And is the crying of the rocks, and, draws in his flocks
To the fortitude of the acceptance of experience.

Delmore Schwartz

The device of the hound, and the recurrence of dogs throughout, are a unifying device in Walcott's long poem. The most memorable dog in the poem, the white dog in a painting in which a white/ black play on color and shadow is used throughout, is ironically the one the author cannot find. But a dog on the street appears early, and is twinned, in fact, during the introduction of the main characters:

A mongrel follows them, black as its shadow,
nosing their shadows, scuttling when the bells
exult with pardon. Young Camille Pissarro
studies the schooners in their stagnant smells . . . (TH 4)

[.]

My wooden window frames the Sunday street
which a black dog crosses onto Woodford Square. (TH 4)

In “Remains of the Past: Stray Dog and Trauma,” Bénédicte Boisseron reads the watchdog as a metaphor for reactions to “forgotten” Caribbean history. Although Boisseron was raised in France, her father had lived primarily in Guadeloupe. She interprets an Antillean reaction to a watchdog as a collective memory of a time

. . . when the dog—exactly like the African slave in the triangle trade—was shipped to the Caribbean island to . . . watch . . . over the undisciplined slaves . . . There are various texts written by well-known authors from Martinique and Guadeloupe (such as Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau) . . . that show how the fate of the dog and the slave were tied together and yet . . . antithetical . . . The eye of a modern tourist walking in Guadeloupe is taken aback by the view of those packs of dogs strolling in the streets like ghastly remnants of a bloody past . . . The stray dog haunts today many literary texts from Africa to the West Indies . . . (Boisseron 1)

This explanation is one example of the background to what might look like incidental detail at first glance. The use of a dog in the title, an artistic detail, is counterpoint with incidental “encountered” dogs throughout the poem. The contrast initiated in the title continues throughout the poem, between art which appears deliberate and ideal, but which alternatively can prove ephemeral and impractical, and the hound, which appears at random, metamorphoses, and alternates between an ideal which has escaped, and a humble creature of appetite, before achieving enduring value as parable and symbol.

When the device of the painting leads the narrator to question how the false memory originated, he recounts his failure to find it inside or outside a museum.

whose reproduction in some book of prints
 of sacred frescoes I have never found
 until I doubt the very beast's existence
 as much as mine sometimes, like the white sound
 made by a snowfall on a winter fence,
 the thunder of my shadow on white sand.
 . . . white hand, white hound, as I remembered them
 Dominis Canae, the rechristened beast! (*TH* 121)

“Domini canes” or “dogs of the Lord” is a self-proclaimed nickname of the Dominicans, the Catholic religious order of preachers, who wear black and white habits; a black and white dog carrying a torch in its mouth is sometimes used as their symbol. A Dominican, Fray Antonio de Montesino, is on record as preaching against slavery at the beginning of the history of the Caribbean, confronting the landowners of Hispaniola in his sermon just before Christmas, 1511: “Tell me, by what right and justice do you keep these Indians in such cruel and humble servitude? ...Are you not bound to love them as you love yourselves? Be certain that in such a state you can no more be saved than the Moors and the Turks” (Chamberlin 9).

“A starved pup trembling” awaiting “charity, and care” (*TH* 138-9), is one of the last dogs to appear in the poem, a commonplace dog, hungry, in need of a home. Walcott’s wayward creature has evolved beyond the characterizations of Dylan Thomas’ “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog” and the literary indictment of Conrad with his “dog in a parody of breeches.”³⁴ Brevity prevents a charge of sentimentality in the representation of a vernacular

life in language that moves to complete the search in terms of a Christian and/or ethical context.

One other association recalls, again, the Veronese painting. The dog looking under the table in both the misattribution and the actual painting is reminiscent of a detail in a Gospel story that the scene implicitly evokes. The Gospel account is not recounted as fable but an actual event, a miraculous healing illustrating the power of humility and persistence. Jesus at first refuses to heal the daughter of a Syro-Phoenician woman, telling her he has been sent to the "house of Israel." But she repeats her request, confident that "even the dogs under the table get the children's scraps." Then Christ, taken by her answer, grants her request (Mark 8, 25-30). In context, this account is antithetical to the murderous self-righteousness of the Inquisition.

The patterns of metaphysical and religious metaphor throughout Walcott's couplets create the impression that not only are inhabitants of the poem seekers, but they are also "being sought." In Walcott's world, nature itself is a reflection of the relationship of creation with the creator: "forgiving bougainvillea," "a prayer's curling smoke," "the branched menorah of a frangipani" (*TH* 162-63). Artistic courage, perceptiveness, and persistence have brought the hope of paradise. *The Hound of Heaven*, a poem by Francis Thompson,³⁵ dramatizes a dialogue in which, instead of the traditional model of a soul seeking God, God becomes Hound, tracker of the individual soul, a soul that runs away in fear. This hound is also psychologically counter to the horror of forcible proselytization, since the redemptive source is narrated without an intermediary.

The use of dogs reflects Walcott's welcome of nature and of creatures in his artistic universe. The dog is also a symbol of faithfulness; Ulysses' dog, in *The Odyssey*, dies of joy

upon the master's return home. Walcott's conclusion likewise links themes of death, joy, faithfulness, and home.

The final image in the poem is of the dog as a constellation, an image of stars recalling Dante's close of each section of the *Divine Comedy* with a rhyme on the word "stars." Walcott uses nature in the Caribbean as a global "home," a global "paradise," which becomes in this detail a mirror of life as a journey toward heaven. The echo of Dante also recalls the "Hound" at the beginning of the *Divine Comedy* (Inf. I.101) who will "find his fare in wisdom, love, and virtue." If the dogs at first appear comedic, as the encounters are repeated and metamorphosed, they approach the sublime.

The sounds of "chanting deliverance from all their sins" in the opening of *Tiepolo's Hound*, inserts the author in the "chorus" of the poetry—in the manner of Michelangelo who placed the sagging portrait of himself in the *Last Judgment*, and Dante, visiting his own cosmology. All could be said to use humor, in this sublime way, which pushes description to its furthest limit. The hound the narrator seeks to revisit is ultimately subject of a search as inventive as the Syro-Phoenician woman willing to rhetorically crawl under the table for her daughter. As we open the book, we find ordinary scenes of commerce as "quiet as drawings." If we are attentive we may discover recurrent moments of grace.

Reviewing the "themes" of Tiepolo's *Hound* in terms of "art as prayer" may involve the reader in a "leap of faith"; overall, the multiple references must be considered indicators of the terms of belief. Walcott himself noted, in "The Figure of Crusoe," that "I once read somewhere that a survey conducted on the most successful films proved that they were the ones which dealt with endurance and survival..." (Hamner 37).

As mentioned early in this essay, the title and cover of *Tiepolo's Hound* prompt

multiple responses. Why, after reading the book, does the dust jacket painting seem more familiar? The numerous references to religious tradition could spark another “Gospel” recognition, the moment when Christ called some of the first disciples as they were “mending their nets.” Or, considering the ubiquitous dogs of daily life, Caribbean reminders compared with hunting dogs in the courtly style of Tiepolo might suggest that the painting places the viewer in the position of a hound, nosing around the island. Readers must find their own wealth of possibility in Walcott, as diligently as his narrator sought a conclusive personal response to “Tiepolo’s Hound.” Most compelling might be the first possibility regarding the cover painting; but such an idea might be thought more appropriate to a time when scriptural pedagogy was the norm, from an academic world now swept by different tides. Although Walcott is exuberantly allusive, his themes are accessible and his observations profoundly engaging. The notions of “prayer” and “spirituality” are particularly elusive. Walcott’s narrative framework, particularly in *Tiepolo’s Hound*, is complex, but translated into sections of allegorical tapestry, allows a running commentary which incorporates the complexity of his text and allows the reader to share to some extent, as exegete, in the devotional process of his art.

Notes

¹ Reflecting Keats' caveat that "Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by singularity."

² Biographer Bruce King tracks fifteen more unpublished plays as well as numerous fragments.

³ In 1943, when V.S. Naipaul was 11 years old, his father self-published a volume of short stories in Trinidad called "*The Adventures of Gurudeva*" and *Other Indian Tales*. Seepersad Naipaul's stories were published in London in 1977 and reissued in 1995.

⁴ In 1889 Trinidadian J. J. Thomas published a rebuttal in London with the title *Froudacity (Froudacity: West Indian Fables by James Anthony Froude explained by J. J. Thomas)* including the observation "it appears that our author [Froude] is the bond-slave of his own phrases."

⁵ An openness, I would suggest, comparable to C. S. Lewis' appraisal that Christ was the only Christian.

⁶ These lines refer in part to original Indian natives of the islands who are also remembered in *Another Life*. Walcott's title and descriptions confirm Wordsworth's encomium that preceded Froude by more than three quarters of a century (1802):

Toussaint...Thou hast left behind

Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;

There's not a breathing of the common wind

That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;

Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

⁷ *Tiepolo's Hound* elicited clipped but positive summaries in *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist*, *Library Journal*, and even an article in *Art Journal* finding that "layering metaphors astonish and exalt" and including insightful remarks on the two Walcott images of Gauguin included in the book (60.1 [2001]: 107). There were also generally favorable reviews in Montreal, Washington D. C., and in *Time* magazine, among others; with fewer unfavorable reactions, such as William Logan's sandwich of reviews with commentaries that seem to repeat a wryness laughing at their own satisfied selves, possibly to the point of choking: "[Reading... [the] tics of Walcott's style... I longed for a potboiler... Jorie Graham's... poems haven't been consigned to hell—they've chosen to live there." (*New Criterion* 18 [2000]: 63) The *Boston Globe* saved its mention of Walcott that year for an oblique reference among touristy tidbits regarding St. Lucia, and Cleveland found James Lawless remarking on a single Walcott poem, "Pissarro at Dusk," as one of the two best poems in the 2000 edition of *Best American Poetry* (*Cleveland Plain Dealer* 29 Oct. 2000: Arts & Life 12) rather than mentioning *Tiepolo's Hound*. The *New York Times Book Review* during the summer of 2000 expended its efforts on a self-conscious rendering of the "consolations of philosophy", a book by a German teenager "about being a German teenager", "Jewish identity crisis" as retold by an aging Philip Roth, and a negative review of reconstructed court life in seventeenth century Denmark (*New York Times Book Review* Mar-May, 2000).

The most extensive coverage appeared in London. The response was somewhat abbreviated and positive for the most part, although the perspective might be scrutinized.

Adam Kirsch included both *Tiepolo's Hound* and King's biography in an essay inclusive of other work concluding that "the evolution of Walcott's style is the central interest of his poetry, since his themes have remained remarkably consistent...: he has always attempted to appeal over the head of history [!!] to the astonishing beauty of the Caribbean, which he proposes as a paradise out of time...[his] greatest strength [is] his confidence to risk an elevated style." (*Times Literary Supplement* 15 Sept. 2000 : 11). In August of 2000, an insightful review appeared in Tokyo:

It is a wonder that this collection has not drawn as much attention as it deserves. Perhaps we have grown accustomed to Walcott's incomparable gifts and thus look to the newcomers, hoping that they will have as much to say and as many gifts with which to say it. This is unlikely, however, because Walcott began his quest when the artistic endeavors had much more popular appeal. The spiritual revelations of a great artist then could draw as much interest as a "pop" novelist or memoirist does today, which, in truth, says all too much about modern culture. This is all the more reason to relish such a work and keep it out on the table, rather than packing it away on the bookshelf. (Ron Breines, *The Daily Yomiuri*, Tokyo 20 August 2000: 15)

Breines' perspective reads like the reality check on a general and chronic malaise.

⁸ This painting, which Gauguin himself considered the epitome of his career, has its permanent home in Boston, the same city where Walcott has spent many years teaching, although it left the United States in 2003 for the first time in 50 years for a retrospective exhibit which opened in Paris.

⁹ Walcott even includes, in this 1973 offering, a poetic "alphabet" of the sort used

prosaically by Polish Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz in his 2001 *Milosz's ABC's*.

¹⁰ Paul Elie, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2003.

¹¹ A database compiled near the end of the twentieth century has consolidated information from 22,227 voyages between 1650 and 1867.

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~du_bois/RESEARCH__OUTREACH/Trans-Atlantic_Slave_Trade_Dat/trans-atlantic_slave_trade_dat.html>

¹² Terada notes, "Walcott acknowledges and at times even rues his dependence on allegory" (214).

¹³ A "stroll," reminiscent of a Walcott remark in a 1975 interview with Robert Hamner that "the pace of strolling is iambic pentameter" (Baer 31).

¹⁴ "It is Love that moves the Sun and all the stars."

¹⁵ An image reminiscent of Poe's story about the Inquisition, "The Pit and the Pendulum."

¹⁶ Four qualities are instantly apparent in Walcott's work. (1) His vocal sensibility. (2) His aesthetic, naturalist and cultural perceptions. (3) His historic and psychological insight. (4) His spirituality. Perhaps these comprise an innate hierarchy; shorter critical responses often do not mention the last quality. Longer monographs have treated it in various and interesting ways. Paul Breslin's "religiosity and Platonism" is one example. Rei Terada's *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry* builds an allusive cultural context that frames a critical understanding of American identity, in Walcottian terms. Terada makes incisive observations in passing: "As in nineteenth-century 'arguments by design,' Walcott chooses elements from a landscape, then infers a deity" (72). Particularly in the fourth

chapter of her *Politics and Poetics*, entitled “The Mind...Sees Its Mythopoeic Coast: Manipulating Myth,” Paula Burnett directly addresses this dimension of Walcott’s poetics.

It may be that he will come to be recognized as a poet of spirituality. His eclectic use of cross-cultural religious myth makes no concessions to those who are convinced of a single “truth,” but . . . postmodernism’s flight from its aridities into the sweet water of the transcendental may prove a propitious coincidence . . . His mythopoeic project is double, [to] . . . narrate . . . his people’s story to them as rite of thanks and to . . . challenge rationalism’s lack of faith . . . (his awareness that Caribbean people do not need lessons in the sacred from him is acute)” (102).

Yvette Christiansë, in her chapter from the Scott/Housley collection, *Mapping the Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literatures* finds that “Walcott’s view of the struggle between colonialism’s desire for transcendence and the local’s desire for simultaneity is ultimately eschatological” (220).

The titles mentioned deal with an entire body of work. Reflections in the present essay may appear simple or even linear; I can only plead my fascination with Walcott’s remarks on artistic process itself as a form of prayer, which I thought lent themselves to a structural exploration of the poem-with-paintings.

¹⁷ “And do you know about the ductus arteriosus? A bypass vessel, it routes blood directly to a developing fetus’s extremities, instead of to the lungs. At the moment of birth, suddenly all blood must pass through the lungs to receive oxygen because now the baby is breathing air. In a flash, a flap descends like a curtain, deflecting the blood flow, and a muscle constricts the ductus arteriosus. After performing that one act, the muscle gradually

dissolves and gets absorbed by the rest of the body. Without this split-second adjustment, the baby could never survive outside the womb.” (Yancey 69).

¹⁸ Audubon was born in Sainte Domingue in 1785. The future painter and naturalist was the illegitimate son of Jean Audubon, a French merchant and sea captain, and Jeanne Rabine, a chambermaid who died in a slave uprising shortly after his birth. He was raised in France by his father and stepmother, then sent to Pennsylvania to avoid conscription in Napoleon’s army and to manage some family property.

¹⁹ A reference to Christ’s words to Peter James and John at Gethsemani before his arrest, “Could you not... watch one hour with me?... The spirit... is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matt. 26: 40, 41; Mark 14: 38)

²⁰ Cimabue ca. 1240-ca. 1302. Giotto, 1267-1337.

²¹ Although Melbye himself is not well known, he was also an important connection for Frederick Church, the Hudson River painter who rendered nearly mural-scale, optically convincing masterpieces of South American landscape such as Cotapaxi’s violent eruption in 1862, as well as Niagara Falls, and the icebergs of Labrador.

²² Monet and Renoir were no better off. In 1998, one of Monet’s “Japanese Bridge” paintings sold for \$32 million, but in the summer of 1869 he wrote to his dealer asking, “Dear friend, do you want to know... how I live, during the week I have waited for your letter? Well, ask Renoir who brings us bread from his mother’s house so that we don’t die of hunger.” (Shakes and Harper 85)

²³ Paul Breslin, near the end of his thoughtful and balanced retrospective review of the concerns of Walcott’s writing, follows Helen Vendler’s search for the meaning of the Cyclops’ teeth in the poem “Greece,” which might also be taken for a prominent example of

the “relentlessly serious and scholarly,” as Wen Stephenson phrases it in his July 2001 essay on poetry critics. Would it not simplify interpretation to consider the “maniacal frothing” of the cave, together with the giant’s lost teeth, reference to a comic collision of some sort after the encounter with Odysseus (alias “Nobody”)? A more specific inquiry might ascertain how “municipal frothing” replaced “maniacal frothing” in the critical collection. Oddly, the reprint in Bloom’s edition mistakenly reads as if Vendler were suggesting a textual improvement (the originally published article is printed correctly).

²⁴ “The American scholar A. O. Lovejoy once observed that the word ‘romantic’ has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing at all...In *The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal* (1948) F. L. Lucas counted 11,396 definitions of ‘romanticism.’” *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, Fourth Edition*. Ed. J. A. Cuddon, revised by C. E. Preston. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.

²⁵ Walcott continues: “Theatre is a joke because the theatre is artificial, and in a way tragedy is a joke in the theatre, because when you describe the great plots, they are comical. I mean, how can a guy not know that he went to bed with his mother. How can a guy kill a woman for a kerchief that she has lost. Ultimately tragedy, when compared to poetry, is a farce.”

²⁶ An apocryphal source names Jeronimo Jose Ramos, a merchant from Braganza, as the last known Jew to be burned alive for secretly practicing Judaism. He had escaped the previous auto-da-fe (“act of faith,” executions by fire) in September of 1752.

²⁷ ““From the speech of infants and children you have framed a hymn of praise” (Matt. 21: 16) and ““Whoever does not accept the reign of God like a little child shall not take part in it”” (Mark 10: 15)

²⁸ “You cannot tell by careful watching when the reign of God will come. Neither is it a matter of reporting it is ‘here’ or ‘there.’ The reign of God is already in your midst.”

(Nothing I could track provided an idiomatic translation. Luke 17: 20-21.)

²⁹ The same subject which caused Veronese so much political difficulty was later spontaneously re-directed by Andy Warhol for twenty large-scale renditions based on Leonardo’s famous painting. Warhol attended Mass regularly although he did not receive the sacraments. Ben Willikens uses the same composition to render an empty room with a long aluminum folding table and multiple tall metal plated doors (Phaidon 202, 206-9).

³⁰ King says he found a book of reproductions with a Tiepolo copy.

³¹ In one reproduction I have found, it looks as if there might be a cat playing at Christ’s feet.

³² Paula Burnett has noted, following some comments about Shakespeare’s nativity of English, “although punning is often scorned, Walcott knows that it is the soul of humor in a language” (x).

³³ Expressed via Shabine in “The Schooner *Flight*”—“I had no nation now but the imagination” (CP 350).

³⁴ *Heart of Darkness* second page of chapter four.

³⁵ “I fled Him, down the night and down the days; /I fled Him, down the arches of the years...” The poem is included as a feature of Walcott’s early classroom landscape in King’s biography (23).

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